

Appreciative Enquiry into Quakers in Education 2012

3 March 2015 | by Anne Watson

1.0 Introduction and recommendations

This feedback report sets out the day's structure, participants' views/ideas and key findings. There were 48 participants at the event, which included teachers, trustees and others from Quaker schools, Quakers working in education as teachers, lecturers and governors and Quakers with an interest in Education. Tim Slack, from Liverpool Quaker Meeting and Julie Hanna from Chester Quaker Meeting, facilitated the meeting, using an approach known as Appreciative Inquiry, and large group participative methods known as World Café and Open Space.

Information about these approaches and methodology is to be found in Appendix B.

This report feeds back the data collected and emerging themes.

The recommendations arising from the day are:

- .. Follow up with a two-day event next year
- .. Consider setting up a group similar to Quakers in Business to share practice.
- .. Undertake further research to define what the core of 'Quaker education' is. What contribution can Quaker education philosophy make?
- .. Disseminate the process and findings from the day through e.g. The Friend, TES, to those working in Quaker schools and other Quakers working in education.

2.0 Theme

The theme for the day was threefold:

1. Identification of "What is the Quaker contribution to education?"
2. How are Quakers supported in their work in Education?
3. In what ways can we move forward and support the work?

3.0 Format and structure

Emphasis throughout the process was on dialogue, small group work and paired conversations. A scene-setting short presentation to inspire discussion and reflection was given by Sarah Evans, Head Teacher, King Edward VI High School for Girls, Birmingham. This was followed by paired conversations, a world café session and after lunch an Open Space workshop with the event ending with participants individually stating their personal next steps. The questions and responses from the World Café session are contained in Appendix A.

4.0 Open Space Feedback

To help Friends School Council, the feedback from the Open Space session is recorded first as it provides the principal information source for identifying the next stages. All the work and outcomes from the paired conversations and World café process provided the foundation material for the afternoon session. A feedback sheet was completed for each workshop including topic, key themes and discussion areas and finally proposed actions. They are recorded here verbatim.

The topic themes explored in the workshops were:

1. How do we continue the work we started today?
2. How do we clearly articulate what it means to be a Quaker School?
3. How can Quakers take Quaker values/practice to the wider (state) community?
4. What makes teaching and learning distinctive in a Quaker school?
5. Can teachers help with teacher stress?
6. How do we create a Quaker philosophy of Education?
7. Quaker Free School?
8. How do we square Quaker values with the need of students to be IT literate in a very transient IT Social Media environment?

1. How do we continue the work we started today? (Host Jonathan Taylor)

Key themes/topics discussed

- .. Publicising the work of Quaker Schools.
- .. Use Sarah Evan's analysis
- .. Write to the press/media to promote Quaker education (publicity group in FSC).
- .. Danger that it is impossible to summarise the Quaker Education philosophy?
- .. Be bolder
- .. Individual schools have individual messages - but speak plainly about the values.
- .. Need to clarify the Education links to the testimonies
- .. Produce a resource?

Key Actions/proposals

- .. Repeat event

- .. Article in The Friend
- .. Create a Group LIG or FSC? Quakers in Education?
- .. Infiltrate professional groups
- .. Compile book - chapters from each school or Quakers in education based on the Quakers in Business green book.
- .. Establish e-mail group of interested people
- .. Write a report of the conference for TES
- .. Look at the universality of Graham Ralph's "Advice and Queries for Bootham" and consider whether this, or something like the Quaker in Business green book could be published?

2. How do we clearly articulate what it means to be a Quaker School?

Key Themes/topics

- .. Misunderstanding about Quaker Schools and that you have to be a Quaker to be in a Quaker School
- .. Quaker Schools in America seem to be much better known with a clearer understanding.
- .. FCE web site
- .. Quaker schools take non-Quaker families on a journey
- .. Quaker Schools are our outreach organisation to encourage children to become Quakers (This could be barrier to some parents choosing a Quaker School)
- .. Should we emphasize the long tradition of fine Quaker Education?
- .. We need to tell interesting stories and send out the message that we are producing children who will have confidence and courage to change the world.

Key Actions and Proposals

- .. Raise the profile of Quakers and therefore it will have an impact on Quaker Schools.
- .. Reinvigorate the Publicity group and how we can make better use of our Old Scholars

3. How can Quakers take Quaker values/practice to the wider (state) community? (Chloe)

Key themes/topics

- .. Quaker directed outreach to schools
- .. Challenges - no relationship between state and independent school sectors.

- .. 'Wellbeing' in schools...How can we support?
- .. Work in the state sector
- .. Develop existing Quaker programmes and promote to schools
- .. Come out as a Quaker
- .. How can we affect Education policy?
- .. Better links between Meetings and schools
- .. Do Quakers care about education?
- .. Do we do enough?
- .. Teacher training (including Quakers)
- .. Better Marketing of what we do now?

Key Actions/proposals

- .. Conflict resolution - bring to all schools and PGCE training
- .. Teaching Silence/walking the labyrinth of silence
- .. Supporting Quakers in supporting educators
- .. Challenging teacher stress/time limits in the state sector.
- .. Encourage changing the school culture

4. What makes teaching and learning distinctive in a Quaker school? (Nigel Newton)

Key themes/topics

- .. Can they be applied to every good school "can't put your finger on it"
- .. Is it about delivery?
- .. Values not exclusive to Quaker Schools or is it about "living it"
- .. Visitors say it's a different ethos but it's differences with relation to relationships.
- .. Integrity (not exclusive) sound marketing/branding. However the Quaker School has a heritage - thread of values
- .. Individual relationships between students and teachers

.. Qualities of the teacher in a Quaker School - you do not have to be a boss in order to maintain control

Key Actions/proposals

.. This is an important issue that needs further investigation.

.. Could a forum be organised to develop a common philosophy of education for Quakers?

.. Continuity of ethos is key to maintaining a distinctive Quaker education.

5. Can teachers help with teacher stress? (Geoff Taggart)

Key Themes/Topics

.. Listening-roles of today's participants to support/connections with local meeting need to be developed.

.. Is a duty of care enshrined in the school (towards teachers?) values as well as accountability. Quaker schools should adapt widely accepted management standards so that authorities cannot act on a whim.

.. The meeting for clearness can be a powerful way for someone (e.g a teacher to air a concern.

Key Actions/Proposals

.. Seek international solidarity with advocates of holistic education and opponents of "high stakes" regimes, which reduce teachers to technicians.

.. Establish links with local meetings so that sympathetic members can listen to and support teachers at Quaker Schools ("supervision")

.. Popularize the "meeting for clearness" as a way for teachers in Quaker schools to air their concerns

.. Ensure that Quaker Schools have management standards which are explicit for all teachers.

6. How do we create a Quaker Philosophy for Education? (John Crosfield)

Key Themes/Topics

Group only provided actions/proposals

Key Actions/Proposals

.. Set up working group to progress the above topic consisting of Geoff Sewell/Geoff Taggart/Lucyenne Curling/Nigel Newton/John Crosfield

.. Nicholas Evens will contact Woodbrooke for their input

.. The group will consider how to bring together all others not represented today into the forum – contacts through advertisements

.. The group will consider audience for the philosophy and what it will comprise.

.. A summary on top of this?

.. Aspirational? Method is a focus of co-operative experiential learning

.. Who is it for? All those interested in Quaker ideas in Education “Quaker Schools” non-Quaker schools, education community generally

7. Quaker Free School (*Sue King and Michael Goodman*)

Key Themes/topics

.. Not as way a way to get rid of Independent Quaker schools, but alongside - not in competition

.. We questioned whether the whole free school movement was viable, ethical etc

... Could a cluster of Q independent schools run/manage a Quaker Academy? (not likely! Or help start a free school

.. Or simply run by Quakers with a good idea.

.. One way forward would be for existing Quaker Schools to provide outreach/training to equip those might run a free school.

.. Primary? Secondary greatest need/impact

Key Actions/proposals

.. In some ways there no great appetite from the group to set up a free school, but the group thought it would be a good challenge the Society of Friends to take the matter up.

.. Or should it be to put our energies into encouraging Quaker values in our current schools. More choice not necessarily great (especially if adding to carbon emissions in increased journey times)

8. How do we square Quaker values with the need for students to be IT Literate in a very transient IT/Social Media environment (*John Woodings*)

Key Themes/topics

.. The egalitarian potential of social media/Facebook/Twitter

.. The disposability of the hardware used to access such channels

.. Cyber bullying is the facelessness of attacking people through social media

.. Young peoples’ self-image and the Avatar/culture (physical appearance)

- .. The “record” of online use and how the mistakes of youth will stay with you.
- .. The blind acceptance of online material - although it is great that we can all contribute.

Key Actions/proposals

- .. Foster thinking in the abstract - literature, visual literacy, create empathy with a faceless profile on line.
- .. Legal changes to remove unsuitable material - debate
- .. Develop awareness/critical literacy of online sources
- .. Back to the individual’s sense of self, dignity and happiness as themselves not defined by image/lifestyle
- .. Science/economics to highlight the disposability of phones, laptops etc - the mining of materials in the developing world etc.
- .. Colonise the online environment as adults and make it less ‘wild west’

5.0 Participant personal actions

At the end of the event participants were asked individually to consider the question:

Considering both your journey here and your journey during today what is the one thing that you will now do differently?

The responses below are reported verbatim and are not prioritised: -

- I am going to talk to the Recording Clerk at BYM about how the Society might take up the idea of a Quaker “Free School”.
- Be aware in my communications of all those people who are part of the Quaker Education Community: on the journey to a wider understanding of what Quakers in education is.
- Meeting an audience that you didn’t realise was there and learning how to support others “out of” Quaker schools.
- To use Quaker values much more actively, openly and obviously in my day-to-day teaching (rather than implicitly) – it is far too easy (unfortunately) to be bogged down with targets; performance and the needs of students to achieve grades/to succeed in exams and to forget using own values.
- Assert the primacy of children’s needs for equality and freedom and play with more courage.
- Listen better: look more carefully at situations
- Nothing different, but more the same: this gathering affirmed my direction of travel.
- I will contact governors more frequently to ask them to share their wisdom
- I shall try to turn the focus outwards from the school to publicise what we are doing
- I will look out for Quakers in state schools and make sure I talk to them at Quaker events.
- As a Governor find ways to listen to the staff in the school: What a Quaker ethos in the classroom means to them.
- Be noisy about Quaker ethos in education.
- More explanation on school website
- Encourage and support outcomes from today
- More promotion of Quaker schools to the general public

- Use silence in lessons more regularly – not for finishing work but for reflection.
- Become more aware of the technological platforms the young people are using
- Make a contribution to raising the profile of Quaker education nationally
- Go to more Quaker Meetings and use their support
- Consider ways of using the practical exercises used today with colleagues at school to explore similar issues, share ideas, plan etc
- Look at a variety of ways to market what it means to be Quaker, what a Quaker school is like etc, in the wider community and beyond.
- Contact the Chair of the Education Committee and involve them in the Quaker school more
- Speak truth to school leaders!
- Listen to my intuition
- Quaker Audit
- Use the techniques experienced today in my future practice in school – also not to worry about ‘the solution’ but to ask the question and see what happens!
- Use “Open Space” technique in INSET sessions etc
- Work towards developing a better understanding of “Quakerism/Quaker history” amongst students.
- Think more radically and try and encourage colleagues, students, Governors to do the same.
- To take time to think and reflect deeply when deciding on a particular course of action, setting alternatives against the touchstone of Quaker testimonies. (And to find the time to do this!)
- I need to go away and think about today – not jump to a quick conclusion about what I will now do differently!
- Ask a few more questions back at school
- Join a working party on – Towards a Quaker view of Education.
- Try to communicate better what Quaker education is and consider Quaker values more when considering advice to schools.
- Focus on a collective endeavour, validate and link/create links with State and Quaker schools
- How can Quaker schools/Quakers bring Quaker viewpoints/practice to the wider state education community?

Appendix A Key themes from World Café sessions

The morning world café discussion produced the following themes from 8 workshop groups. Ticks denote the most popular thoughts, ideas and suggestions that were voted on during the lunch break. The questions for the initial Appreciative Conversations in pairs were:

1. Can you share a story about a time or experience in your work/role in education as a Quaker, or in your work in a Quaker school, when you contributed to making a difference?
2. If doing things differently could become the norm in your area of work describe:
 - a. The smallest step that could be taken to enable this to happen
 - b. The most radical step that could be taken to enable this to happen.
3. Now consider the Quaker testimonies in relation to education/your answers and what role they have to play?

Followed by World Café discussions focusing on the following questions:

1. In small groups share the emerging themes/stories from the questions and keynote address input plus the information from the testimonies and through small group discussion identify and list the core elements of the contribution Quakers in any capacity make to the Education field.

2. Secondly, identify the challenges facing Quakers working in Education and what needs to be done differently

Group 1

- Individual Dignity
- Speaking truth to power (and back)
- Honest and open communication
- No bullying
- Allowing the school community to take responsibility for their own actions!
- Inclusivity
- Optimism
- Recognising that of God in everyone and in every student
- Treat them like humans

Group 2

- Silence
- Community
- Relationships
- Questioning
- Respect and Equality and Tolerance
- Service (and being served/servant leadership)
- That of God in everyone

Group 3

- See that of God in each - value
- Share facilities – outreach – community: charity and bursaries
- Plain speaking and truthfulness
- Silence – class, meeting, grace
- Transparency and honesty
- Quaker tool kit – set of methods – conflict resolution and participation
- Quaker work in Education – doesn't have to be uniquely Quaker – it is WHAT WE DO!

Group 4

- Integrity
- Moral form of work
- Learning school
- Responsibility and accountability
- Truth and honesty
- Ethical Community?
- Vocation
- You teach who you are – Parker Palmer

Group 5

- Sharing, taking responsibility
- Sharing our Quaker ideas and publish
- Reality confrontation
- Find a balance between individualism and community
- Courage to speak out
- Listening, tolerant of others views
- Inclusivity and equality

Group 6

- Relationships
- Quaker philosophy of education in print – story to tell
- Our concern for the individual child is linked to “that of God in everyone” – our education is underpinned by our spiritual values, each with his/her intrinsic worth
- Peace – alternative view
- Be open to a range of possibilities
- Rejects hierarchy
- Supports equality
- Forum to put together the key elements to use
- Many starting points such as silence
- Relationships

Group 7

- Listening
- Identify what is important – “the deep end”
- Simplicity (rethink systems, strategies, silence) in sharing values.
- Get in the deep end.
- Quality of interpersonal relationships – Love

Group 8

- Keep the big picture of life development alive. Integrity and honesty in how we speak. Needs courage.
- Happiness – children should be “happy”. Develop self-worth.
- Courage to speak out on the testimonies
- Equality – everyone is an individual whose needs should be respected

Appendix B

Short description of Appreciative Inquiry and whole system techniques World Café and Open Space

Appreciative Inquiry

First developed in the 1980s at Case Western University, USA, and now used across the world in organisations like the UN, Oxfam, and BBC and by private sector companies, such as ING bank, AI is:

The cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations and the world around them.

It involves the discovery of what gives life to a living system and when it is most effective, alive, and constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms.

AI involves the art and practice of asking unconditional positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend anticipate and heighten its potential.

AI interventions focus on the speed of imagination and innovation instead of the negative, critical and spiralling diagnoses commonly used in organisations/communities. The discovery, dream design, destiny/delivery model links the energy of the positive core to changes never thought possible.

Cooperrider et al; 2008, pg. 3

AI is particularly suited to innovation in creating new visions and strategies as it encourages story sharing and dialogue to learn about the best of the past, and to use that as a basis for imagining the most preferred future for the community/organisation/city. When the whole system aligns with a positive image of the future multiple projects and actions can be designed, agreed upon, and implemented to create that future.

While classic organisation and strategy development processes are generally seen to be linear - identifying the problem then planning how to rectify it - AI is cyclical in nature. AI moves the story to an image of the future with the clear understanding that all 'plans' are momentary solutions. Plans are made relevant and successful by keeping all options open, and assuring dialogue and 'dreaming' is a continuous process.

Below are some examples demonstrating the wide range of applications of AI:

.. The City of Cleveland has been using Appreciative Inquiry to plan and create its economic, environmental and social future using large-scale community summits

.. Imagine Chicago launched AI as a viable process of city and community visioning¹, which has subsequently been used across the world in initiatives such as Imagine Nepal, Imagine St Helens, and Imagine Singapore

.. The City of Denver used the AI process to successfully tackle a \$70M deficit

.. West Kent Housing Association used AI as part of its path to be the first RSL to get three star statuses from the Audit Commission.

World Café

World Café is an approach that emerged from people noticing how much more engaged and connected people were in the informal conversations at conferences and events - the buzz over coffee and at breaks is often the noisiest and most animated. Imagine an event where every conversation was this riveting: this is a World Café!

"An event structured in this way aims to 'foster the conditions for the emergence of collective intelligence by engaging people in dynamic strategic conversations around questions that matter to their lives and work". *World Café Handbook*

The World Café is a creative process for facilitating collaborative dialogue and the sharing of knowledge and ideas to create a living network of conversation and action. In this process a café ambiance is created, in which participants discuss a question or issue in small groups around the café tables. At regular intervals the participants move to a new table. One table host remains and summarises the previous conversation to the new table guests. Thus the proceeding conversations are cross-fertilized with the ideas generated in former conversations with other participants. At the end of the process the main ideas are summarized and follow-up possibilities are discussed.

Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) is most distinctive for its initial lack of an agenda, which sets the stage where participants begin by creating the agenda for their event. Typically, the sponsor introduces the purpose and then the group creates the working agenda, as individuals post their issues and invitations to host a conversation in bulletin board style. Each individual 'convener' of a breakout session takes responsibility for naming the issue, posting it on the bulletin board, assigning it a space and time to meet, and then later, showing up at that space and time, kicking off the conversation, and recording its key points and outcomes. At the end of the process information from all the self-forming groups is collated and actions agreed.

1 See http://www.childfriendlycities.org/pdf/imagine_chicago_citizenproject.pdf

The approach is characterised by five basic mechanisms: (1) a broad, open invitation that articulates the purpose of the meeting; (2) participant chairs arranged in a circle; (3) a 'bulletin board' of issues and opportunities posted by participants; (4) a 'marketplace' with many breakout spaces that participants move freely between, learning and contributing as they 'shop' for information and ideas; and (5) a 'breathing' or 'pulsation' pattern of flow, between plenary and small-group breakout sessions. (*Harrison Owen*)

All these strength-based approaches are highly adaptable. They can be used in meetings of a few people and with over 500. Behind them all sits the law of two feet, or mobility: 'If you are no longer learning or contributing, then move to a more productive place.'

Tim Slack and Julie Hanna August 2012