



Quaker Insight in Education

The Quaker Values in Education Group



This booklet has been written by the Quaker Values in Education Group, 2016.

QVinE, which is a listed group within Britain Yearly Meeting, grew out of a widely held concern about the state of our schools and the impact of recent policy moves on the educational principles and practices to which many teachers feel committed.

This publication is the product of a process of discernment which has included Quaker and non-Quaker teachers, and others concerned with education in a variety of roles. Discernment is a worshipful search for truth. It is primarily intended for Quaker teachers, who feel a tension between what is required of them in schools, and their beliefs and values as expressed in our testimonies to truth, peace, simplicity and equality. However, many non-Quaker teachers may find inspiration in the leadings expressed in this little booklet. QVinE thinks it essential to spell out the clear lines of connection between those testimonies and the education of our children. Our hope is that this exercise will help and support teachers as they endeavour to take those values with them on a daily basis into their schools and classrooms.

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Every person is precious – a foundation for Quaker action on education

Quakers believe that the spirit of God is at work in every human being and this belief holds true for our work in education. Our faith commitment to truth, peace, simplicity and equality guides our thinking and our action.

Truth includes perspectives on truth, knowledge and accountability

Peace includes community, consideration and conflict resolution

Simplicity includes clarity and sustainability

Equality includes diversity, compassion and respect

We are therefore committed to working towards schools where people matter, where they thrive through relationships and where the beauty of the whole person can be affirmed. We believe people flourish best in an all-embracing culture of encouragement, nurture and compassion for teachers, children and young people. The purpose of education is the pursuit of learning, knowledge and questioning in the service of realising our full human potential in an ever-changing world. Its fruits include: discernment, creativity, cooperation, spirituality, moral autonomy and peace. Its outcome will be a fair, diverse, just and good society.

Foreword

Quaker faith and actions arise from personal experience and an individual understanding of God. That is why Quakers often pose questions and offer statements for consideration, rather than telling people what to believe or how to act. In that spirit we have devised this collection of writings for people active in, or interested in, education.

Quaker *Advices and Queries* inform our spiritual and social lives and say that they are for our 'comfort and discomfort'. Some of the phrases used in this booklet come from *Advices and Queries*.



Quaker values and the classroom



Queries and statements for individual contemplation by those who teach and assist teachers.

Any teacher could say a lot about teaching influenced by ideas from many sources. Here we use what has been said in published writings of Friends (Quakers) in education, arising from our testimonies of peace, truth, simplicity and equality.

Each child is unique, precious and a child of God.

-  How do you seek, listen to and respect this in your teaching and learning with them?
-  How do the children feel and know this from your practice?

Quakers seek truth. Each subject has its forms of truthfulness, explored in different ways.

-  How do you foster the ways of seeking and speaking truth, and then sustain them?
-  How do you maintain awe and wonder, while making conjectures and thinking it possible you may be mistaken?
-  How do you help people to be open and discerning towards new ideas?

All learning builds on experience, from wherever it comes.

- How do you value and use learners' insights, in whatever form they are expressed?
- How do you provide opportunity to express what they imagine in gesture, tone, movement, sound, words, materials and symbols?
- How do they consider those things that are eternal?

Learners thrive when they feel cared for, and their ways of thinking are valued.

- How do you balance your support for collective work, concern for individuals, and respect for the integrity of your subject?

Learners need coherent and connected experiences, but institutions and testing can lead to fragmentation.

- How do you help them to integrate the different aspects of what they have learned?
- How do you help them appreciate the value of knowledge?
- How do you encourage learners to give considered responses rather than immediate reactions to questions and tasks?
- How do you understand the views of others and encourage them also to understand each other?

Silence supports reflection and reconsideration.

- Is silence valued, as well as listening and discussion?

Quaker values and the individual school



Queries and statements for contemplation by schools, governors and management teams.

Quakers believe that each person is unique, precious and a child of God.

-  Is our school a place where every member of the school community is held in esteem?
-  Do we foster respect and mutuality, with learning a shared endeavour and knowledge a shared resource?
-  How does our school seek to understand and demonstrate an appreciation for diversity and difference with a passion for equality?

The whole community can uphold the life of each child, not only adults in school, but also peers, parents, carers and others outside the school.

-  Is there a sense of community both within and beyond the school walls that reflects this?
-  How do we nurture community contributions and responsibilities?

Quakers foster a willingness to seek truth wherever it may be found.

 In our school how are people encouraged to hear the 'promptings of love and truth' and is there a time when they can be spoken, even when circumstances are challenging?

 Is there space in our school life to consider that we may be mistaken, and to ensure we listen to others and each other?

 How do we ensure that everyone is heard?

Quaker approaches to discipline and conflict take time and depend on individual willingness to change.

 Is peacemaking an active principle within the experience of everyone in our school?

 Is there a culture of mutual supportiveness in which conflict can lead to a willingness to understand and resolve disputes?

 Where and how is militarism manifested in our school, and how can we challenge the values and practices of militarism?

Quakers have always valued learning, and personal reflection.



How is everyone helped to feel and understand that education is for their personal and lasting benefit, and that schooling is just the beginning of a lifelong process of learning?



How do we all take responsibility for our own learning, coupled with a capacity to ask for the support of others when needed?



How do we balance the values of individual effort against those of collaborative endeavour?



How do we recognise our accountability to all those who are affected by the work of the school including pupils, parents, the local community and society in general?



How do we reflect on our performance not only in terms of test and examination results, but also in relation to wider aims concerning human flourishing?

Our understanding of the world leads us to commit ourselves to sustainability.

-  How do we promote an understanding that all of us share a responsibility for the environment and need to develop sustainable lifestyles, which celebrate simplicity rather than extravagance and exploitative behaviour?
-  How is our school providing individual and collaborative opportunities for this to happen?

Supporting teachers with Quaker values



In this section we offer advice *from* teachers *for* teachers who strive to uphold testimonies of peace, truth, simplicity and equality in their working lives.

Decide what is right according to the testimonies of peace, truth, simplicity and equality and be clear what you value in yourself, and how you can ground your work in what you know to be true.

Values

Attend to what love requires of you, and celebrate what you do well.

Think about 'a good day's work' rather than dwell on guilt. Teaching is never finished.

Be clear about what you can do, and what is beyond your power, knowledge, and time.

You might find yourself working to standards of truth that conflict with imposed standards. Decide where you can fit in and where you are willing to stick out. You will not be alone.

Let your life speak, and be a pattern for others.

Relationships

The deep effects of your teaching are long term and reflect the relationships you form in and out of the classroom.

Take heed to the promptings of love and truth in your own heart.

Children and adolescents are people and you can seek that of God in them and find what is eternal.

What your teaching feels like today is probably not what lasts for them, even till tomorrow; you can start afresh in your relationships every day.

You are a member of the classroom community. They need to feel that you care about them, but do not assume that they know how to care about you.

Trust yourself to do your best.

Trust them and support them to respond to positive expectation; they may be capable of doing more than you expect.



Discernment

Teaching pulls you in many directions: self/other;
what is done well/not well; pressures of work/family life;
curriculum demands/pastoral care.
Make reflection and discernment a natural part
of your professional life.

Be discerning about the prevalent language, attitudes and practices in your school.

Use stillness and silence for yourself as you teach, for yourself in other professional contexts, and with others when you can.

Identify what is good in your own practice and that of others.

Be content with doing what you can according to your values and the reasonable demands of the work, and forgive yourself for those things that you did not, or could not, do better.

Replace self-criticism, and criticism by and of others, with reflection and discernment; be aware that you may be mistaken.

Value the judgement of children; the heat of the classroom does not always give a balanced impression of their

Sources of support

Stillness and silence, alone or with others, have supported Quakers in difficult times for 350 years. You are not alone.
All caring professionals need support from friends, peers, and others.

Ask for the kind of support you need, and offer it for others.

Seek out teachers in your local meeting, area meeting, and Britain Yearly Meeting; they can provide a safe place to let off steam, and also a place to accept how things are and move on.

In times of great stress, ask other Quaker teachers, or local Friends, for a meeting for clearness.

If you cannot attend meeting for worship regularly, find a regular occasion when you can worship with other Quaker teachers and helpful Friends who have strength and time.

You may find that you cannot act with integrity in your school and have to choose between leaving or initiating change. You are not alone. Seek truth wherever it may be found and draw on Quakers to support you. Not all schools are the same.

Prepare clear expressions of what you value in your work, and what your institution values in your work.

Prepare clear expressions of your wish to act with integrity consider using Quaker writings to support your position.

Join with others through professional associations; participate in debate; find ways for your voice to be heard.

Explain your position to colleagues; you may not be alone do you have the courage to speak truth to power?

If you know you must refuse to act in certain ways, seek clearness and support.

Quaker values in a thriving system of schooling.



Quaker convictions about what constitutes a worthwhile school system are derived from the values inherent in our faith and practice.

They also reflect Quaker engagement with social issues across many spheres and for many years. They are part of our continuing concern for human flourishing.

We hold fast to some key convictions about schooling which emerge from our consideration of classroom practice and our comments on the management of individual schools.

-  We believe that each human being is unique, precious and a child of God. This implies that the education of each child and young person is seen to be equally important and equally deserving of care and of attention to individual needs. The perception of individual needs can only take place in the classroom and the compassionate teacher is best placed to understand those needs. We are suspicious of stereotyping children according to imposed categories.
-  This belief affects what we wish to see embodied in all schools. We want to see a system which fosters the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical development of each individual and prepares them to become adults committed to justice, tolerance, compassion and cooperation.

 We look for an approach to school evaluation which does not restrict itself to those things which can be quantified. A good school looks to the interpersonal and the social education of each child. We look for a curriculum which makes space for and values all aspects of child development.

 We believe that schooling should be resourced in a way which reflects our convictions about equality. We are concerned that schools are becoming too diverse and too differentially regulated, financed and governed without adequate transparency.

 We are convinced that teachers and other school staff are key elements in successful schooling and should be respected and supported as such. A healthy school system needs to empower teachers through making full use of their knowledge, their professional skills and their experience.

Epilogue

Following the traditions of Quakers,
we take it as a responsibility to act on these beliefs
and seek ways to speak these truths to those in power.

We hope that this document has demonstrated a distinction between fundamental educational values and politically motivated priorities. Though the latter may constrain practice, deep questions about the education of the young persist.

Values go beyond fashion and topicality.



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