

Reconsidering Quaker Higher Education:

A New Vision for a New Time

Tuesday, August 25, 2020

7:00 pm EDT

Chat summary

1) Opening small breakout groups

Queries:

- If you have been a student in a Quaker school or college, what did you value most about your experience there?
- If you work or have worked in a Quaker educational institution, what do you most value from what its Quaker identity offers?
- If neither of those applies: how might the transformation of Quakerism and of Higher Education be a mutually supporting process?
- If you have been involved in FAHE, how has this organization's activities or vision influenced your own vision for higher education?

Breakout group responses:

I wonder how many of us would check the "mixed race" box when filling out a survey. I would.

I would and do.

One point at the very end of our discussion -- how do competitive activities (e.g. competitive sports) square with Quaker values at Quaker institutions?

Swarthmore football team in my era was always proud of losing, but I needed the physical activity of a sports team. And that as always subordinate to the academic goals.

Teams also create a collaborative spirit. My daughter who teaches art says she can tell who is on a team because they are better at cleaning up at the end of class.

Competition isn't anathema, as long as it's accompanied by understanding that we're "playing with" our innate tribal nature while simultaneously trying to transcend it.

My experience is that Quakers have much to teach the non-religious world about community. Many academics don't have a sense of how to form community and are quite awkward socially.

Our team brought up the positive value of having Quaker meetings and Quakers associated with educational institutions that are not Quaker. We also noted that some Quaker colleges seem reluctant to claim that identity.

I'm interested in knowing more about how you bring Quaker values into a non-Quaker school. I am a Quaker teaching in a state school also.

2) Laura Rediehs' presentation on Quakerism in Higher Education

I so appreciate what you said about ethics and moral formation.

Laura, you first came to my attention after I had stumbled across early Friends' probably interaction with Spinoza. Say more if you like.

I am interested in the question of Truth and developing the ability to tell the truth about our involvement in the perpetuation of oppression in our past as Quakers and as the higher education field.

With the emphasis on "values" we can reconcile a Quaker/nonQuaker environment. How though do we "live" Woolman's sense of us being united by a principle that makes of us brothers and sisters - would you say that that principle equates to our values?

Just as individuals who have been damaged by other religions find their ways to our meetings; much of higher education still feels a reaction to what they view as the anti-intellectual nature of religion.

Teaching over Zoom, I think it is especially important to create a sense of community and to realize how many of our students (SUNY Potsdam, small public school north of the Adirondacks) are living through traumatic times and need support and hope.

What role does contemplation play for you in Quaker education?

As a student at Pendle Hill in the late 1980s, and with cousins, and mother for a year, and uncle, who went to Quaker high schools and colleges, I appreciated the role of contemplation at Pendle Hill (called at time - a Quaker Center for Study and Contemplation) - and in the role of Silent Meeting at some Quaker schools.

What do you think about the role of contemplation in Quaker higher education? Centering down, meditation in a sense, worship, a de facto relation response, seem to inform a culture of caring at Quaker schools, in my experience - and in the formation of Friends' learning communities. What do you think?

My colleagues were talking today about the need for meditation in focusing and calming our students.

What you have described could neatly fit into a philosophy course, but ideally it should pervade the culture of the whole institution. For example, such things could be taught in accounting classes, science classes, business classes, education classes, engineering classes, etc etc etc.

Can you say more about cultivating student's capacity to love?

Right this minute in the midst of a pandemic in an asynchronous classroom, my focus is on being patient and being kind with ourselves and with each other. If I get anywhere close, then I've done what I hoped.

3) Stephen Pottoff's talk on Quaker gifts:

Thanks, Stephen, for your remarks that remind us that one of the palpating questions today for Quaker schools is continued relevancy.

With regard to questions of diversity, inclusion, and social justice, how do we engage our communities in difficult conversations and help one another move beyond discomfort toward wisdom and reconciliation.

As someone who grew up with Quaker influences, how did you, as a student, bring that learning into your classroom when no one else around knows the Quaker lingo and values "Community" and "Love" and "Truth" all with capital letters.

I'm still resonating with Diego Navarro's (last month's FAHE series presenter's) emphasis on ensuring that all my students feel they belong in my class and my institution.

Gifts equate in some cases to privilege. Can we celebrate ours and others' gifts and still work for justice.

I'm not sure that I understand a conflict between "gifts" and "privilege" if we mean the gifts we bring with us from our inner Light and our life experience.

You have enumerated the benefits of a quaker education. Is there a generally agreed upon definition of 'quaker education' or even a list of things (like you started) that characterize a quaker education?

4) Gray Cox's presentation on "How Might Truth Prosper Amongst Us?"

Summary Question:

How can the pandemic create opportunities to transform our classes and institutions so that they are: Student Centered, Decentralized, Place-based, Community Supported, and Online Enhanced in ways that are Spirit-led – nurturing the growth of a community of ethical beings that develop right relationships with each other and the creatures in their environment? "

Benevolent gazing?

I'd never before made the connection between my Quaker values and the practice of metacognition.

Are there measures that might be used to convince the larger community to engage in what they may see as a revolution?

K-12 Quaker schools are more likely to think about the growth of individuals students over time. At colleges, even Quaker colleges, we think of growth within an individual course.

You ask 'how can the pandemic' create opportunities. It is important to note that there is more to the pandemic than coping (for example, with zoom). It could also include things like students reaching out to the elderly sequestered in nursing homes.

I am curious how to bring into online course ware (such as MIT OCW in 4 languages, or edX's many universities' offerings in many languages) your Friendly approach (Brainstorming-wise) ... and even regarding a #RealisticVirtualEarth as classroom - re another version of learning in a place-based way?

I particularly liked the idea in your language course that learning to learn transfers to other subjects and continues even after the course is over. That is a critical change in students becoming life-long learners.

I want to take your class... love the idea of focusing on learning how to learn in a given topic.

It would be revolutionary if some graduates of Quaker educational institutions who have amassed fortunes in the world of finance (and there are many) would cut spending on themselves to 50%. How can we educate future "Quakers" to do that?

I particularly like the idea, as a language teacher, of making students responsible for their own learning and helping them find the tools as well as the curiosity and dedication to keep on learning.

I'm so grateful for your beautiful presentations. I'd like to continue the conversation.

As a member of Haverford Corp, I'm interested in your comment at the beginning of this session re: students having the same demands as they did x many years ago. Are you willing to discuss this some more?

Let's begin online Quaker schools and universities in all ~200 countries, and in their official languages, including especially in Africa together?

Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship by Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel - an important history of Friends race relations.

Also important for Quaker Future is the fact that the majority of the ~300,000 Quakers globally are now living in Kenya and Bolivia.

It's worth checking out The End of White Christian America if you're not familiar with it. In my own experience unprogrammed Quakers' discomfort with relating to Christian churches -- even liberal ones -- has cut us off from one possible route for learning and change.