

CHRONICLES OF Quaker Education



Friends Select middle schoolers at Race Street Meetinghouse, where meeting for worship is held weekly.



"This I know experimentally . . ."

— George Fox

Experiential Practice from Our Quaker Roots

Friends schools provide students with direct experiential learning through worship, through shared decision-making, through active exploration and reflection in the classroom. This issue highlights examples of experiential practice inspired by our Quaker roots. Friends school communities experience renewal as they engage and reflect on their core commitments as Quaker, experiential, truth-seeking environments.

Re-shaping worship groups, student meeting for business, and cross-school dialogue are enlivening Friends school communities through Quaker practices.

Bringing Down the Silence

Forty 2 to 5 year olds gather twice daily, once at each morning and afternoon session, at **Fairville Friends School** (Mendenhall, Pennsylvania). As children enter the school's newly-built, light-filled Meeting Room, they pick up a carpet square to sit upon. In the beginning of the school year, head of school Barbara Marchese leads Meeting, spending time acclimating children to the way to sit quietly ("criss-cross-applesauce"), what to do with their hands ("Open, shut them . . . place them in your lap"), and to various ways of listening. Led by teachers, Meeting begins with songs and often centers on children's literature with relevant themes such as family, peace, friendship, and nature. After reading a book, a teacher poses a question for the children to consider during the silence.

"Then we all bring the silence down together," Barbara says. Everyone raises their hands high, and all bring their hands down to signify the start of worship. All are quiet for about one full minute, "which is sufficiently long for them," says Barbara. The teacher then breaks silence and asks the children to share their thoughts around the question. Some sharings are directly related to the question and are profound ("Friends are people who care about you"), some are heartfelt ("I love my mommy"), and others simply express what's on a preschooler's mind ("I got new shoes!"). "Meeting is a safe place to share thoughts and feelings. It sets the tone for everything here," says Barbara. Favorite titles from Fairville's Meeting bookshelf include:

A Little Peace, Barbara Kerley
Somewhere Today, Shelley Moore Thomas
If Peace Is . . ., Jane Baskwill
Because of You, B.G. Hennessy
Each Living Thing, Joanne Ryder
All the Colors of the Earth, Sheila Hamanaka
My Mother Is Mine, Marion Dane Bauer
And Here's to You!, David Elliott

Shining Stones & Student Queries

When you're seven years old, following directions is an important part of the school experience. Speaking out of the silence of Meeting for Worship can be confusing from this young perspective. Why don't I need to raise my hand? How do I know if I should speak? Some Meetings can be pretty quiet. Students at **Plymouth Meeting Friends School** (Pennsylvania) are practicing the skills of speaking from the heart in a worshipful setting through monthly worship sharing groups using centering objects in the classroom.

Each grade takes a turn generating queries as the focus for worship sharing. Classes often combine, with older students joining their "meeting buddies." This year, many classes use centering objects from nature. The Primary classes (1st and 2nd grades) choose a shiny stone from a basket at the start of worship. As they center on the queries, students share their thoughts as they feel led, then put their stone back in the basket.

"Using centering objects made a huge difference in how students have responded to the queries: you hold the stone, and when you have something of a deep nature to say, you have one chance, either to say it aloud or to hold your thought as you return your stone to the basket. It made their space to speak important, and they are more reflective," says Primary teacher Debbie Bakan.

New "Assembling" Brings New Energy

—Galen Horst-Martz, Friends Select School

One of the high points of the week at **Friends Select School** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is the short walk to the Race Street Meetinghouse for weekly Meeting for Worship. Traditionally, each of the three divisions of the school had its own time slot for Meeting.

Friends Select's Quakerism Committee, made up of students and faculty, has been seeking ways to strengthen the ties between the middle and upper school divisions. Last year, a new six day rotation schedule of classes inspired a change: we began combining the two divisions for a larger Meeting for Worship twice a month, with each group still meeting as a single division once a month. For the remaining week, one division meets alone in the Meetinghouse for unprogrammed worship while the other division remains in classrooms to have worship sharing in smaller groups.

The rearrangement has led to some very positive developments. The combined Meetings give the younger students, who usually offer little spoken ministry, a chance to observe the older students speaking in meeting, and perhaps to find their own voices. Increased opportunities for worship sharing provide a smaller setting for students who may be intimidated by the large grouping, and can gain confidence in speaking in the more intimate gatherings.

At the first such combined Meeting many sensed a new energy and richness not felt each week. One speaker compared it to being at a wedding with the two families coming together to witness the beginning of a new union.





Sparks for Friends Schools Across the Country

The Friends Council on Education has had inquiries in the past year from passionate people interested in starting Friends schools in the following diverse regions around the country:

Gainesville, Florida
 St. Petersburg, Florida
 Atlanta, Georgia
 Chicago, Illinois
 Fairfield, Indiana
 New Orleans, Louisiana
 Hanover, New Hampshire
 West Knoxville, Tennessee
 Austin, Texas
 Burlington, Vermont
 Morgantown, West Virginia

We are excited to know of growing energy to create more Friends school communities, which are a resounding force for good in the world!

Visit the Friends Council website to:

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES

Find resources for peace education and Quaker curricula.
 Go to: *Fac/Admin > Resources*

MAKE A GIFT

Online giving to support the work of the Friends Council on Education is now available.
 Click on: *Make a Gift* on the homepage.

BUY PUBLICATIONS

We recommend these titles to support ongoing Quaker renewal and reflection in your school community:

Friends Testimonies in Friends Schools

Meeting for Worship: Written for Students by Students

Quaker Testimonies in the Life of Friends Select School: A Scope & Sequence, Grades PreK-12

Go to: *Fac/Admin > Publications*

www.friendscouncil.org

Creating a Quaker Core

Newly Formed Friends Schools Describe Emerging Spiritual Practices

Newly formed Friends schools share ways they are establishing a Quaker core within their school communities.

What practices and spiritual traditions are emerging, and what is the outcome? What can established Friends schools glean from these experiences?

Worship at the Center

“At Friends School of Charlotte (North Carolina) we are creating a Quaker culture by placing shared silent worship at the center of all we do,” says head of school David Kern. “We want to help everyone in our community develop a capacity for silent worship and to establish quiet reflection as a regular practice across activities, whether it’s Meeting for Worship, morning meeting, lunch, or celebrations that include parents, such as celebrating the conclusion of the first conflict resolution seminar, our first Thanksgiving together, and at the close of our community involvement projects and field trips.”

Friends School of Charlotte’s goal is that worship will become a welcomed process for each individual and become naturally connected to the experience of joy and community. Recent renovations allowed the School to open a large common space in the center of the building for Meeting for Worship. David explains, “We gather each week, our ‘Back Jack’ chairs set in a circle, with our seven students, Michelle, our teacher, myself, and any guests who have come to visit. We often read a story before Meeting to help us center and spur reflections. We end each Meeting with ‘After thoughts’—a time for students to share thoughts or learnings they had during Meeting or otherwise reflect on the process itself—and this has been a particularly rich time when we further explore the carings and concerns of our community.”

Themes for Worship and Exploration

Friends School of Portland, Maine, a pre-school-7th grade school with 54 students, sets monthly themes to guide all-school worship on Mondays, and all-school assemblies on Fridays. Friends School of Portland’s theme for December is “Light.” The Grade 3-4 class created the following queries which were read at the all-school Meeting for Worship each week.

Queries on Light

- What is light?
- How does light influence my concentration in the day?
- How can light help us?
- How do I shine light on everyone no matter who they are or what they have done?
- Do I seek to find the light in everyone and everything?
- How do I store the light?
- How do I fill myself with light?
- How do we find light in the darkest month of the year?
- How do I find the courage to seek light when sorrow fills the earth?

Weekly assemblies give students a kinesthetic opportunity to engage and reflect on these themes. For the Light theme, older students worked with their younger student buddies to cut out stars. Each student pair wrote on the star what about them shines. In a later assembly, students pasted their shining stars into constellation maps. In another assembly, student pairs cut out candle shapes on which they wrote a hope for the world, and hung them around the school. Other themes for the year include: winter survival and celebration; warmth and love; service and change; spring, rebirth and Earth Day; peace; and endings and beginnings.

Great Expectations

As of this writing, Friends Center for Children, a parent cooperative child care in New Haven, Connecticut, has been open for just three weeks! As the newest of the Friends Council membership applicant schools, the program is still unfolding, and the Quaker core is still forming. FCFC director Gay Firth plans to work with staff on expanding the developmental benchmarks for students in ways that will reflect the Quaker dimension of the program, including areas such as growth in learning to cooperate and treating others with kindness and consideration. “We look at our Quaker values in how we are treating each other—kid to kid, parent to teacher, teacher to child.”

“Process Is Liberating!”

Now in its third year, Harford Friends School (Street, Maryland) began with a monthly Meeting for Business as part of the schedule. “I knew from my experience at Wilmington Friends School (Delaware) that Meeting for Business is empowering for middle schoolers,” said Jonathan Huxtable, head of school. “We work under the premise that ‘process is liberating,’ a concept I borrow happily from Wilmington’s middle school head Bill Neff.” Students are encouraged to use community problem-solving to make change, as a way of “making complaints productive by being open to group process,” Jonathan says. The School has developed forms to support Business Meeting process, helping students to clarify proposals, evaluate and think through proposed committees. The School’s Solutions Committee threshes topics before they are brought to the meeting. A Spirit Committee organizes school events and celebrations. “The Spirit Committee brought a recommendation for more ‘mingling time’ during Grandparents and Special Friends day, feeling that the day was over programmed. The resulting schedule was magical, creating space for connections among grandparents, across families and with the school.”



Students at Friends School of Portland collaborate on a rainbow. The School, located on Mackworth Island off the coast of Maine, will grow to include 8th grade next year.



TORCH Ignites Student Leadership

— J. Wilson R. Felter, Greene Street Friends School

Walking into a room full of students being led by their peers in a Quaker Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business is one of the most gratifying experiences I've had in my ten years as a Quaker educator. I have always appreciated the manner in which Quakers run meetings: the reflective silence, the expectant waiting for wisdom, the feeling that all viewpoints are invited and heard, and the connection to the outcome when it is

arrived at through a sense of the meeting. Of course, there are the frustrations as well: the time it takes for a decision to be made, the way in which a small group can block momentum, the sense of impatience that overwhelms you when you realize the group has been talking about an issue for an hour with no perceived progress.

It is enlightening to see how middle school students at **Greene Street Friends School** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) experience these gratifying and frustrating moments. It is new for them. They are not bogged down by any previous experiences. They make mistakes, learn from them and laugh about them, and much is revealed about the group in the meeting.

When I arrived at this particular Student Meeting for Business, the clerk was trying to reflect back the sense of the meeting to the group on an issue raised by a group of students. This group wanted to change the school policy regarding early morning drop-off. Some students wanted the option of going indoors every day, not just on bad weather days, others said the policy worked just fine, and thought changing it would create supervision problems for teachers.

Our student clerk tried time and time again to gain a sense of the meeting by stating it to the group and, each time, was thwarted because the energy was not focused. Finally, the clerk stated, "Does anyone have a problem with our Middle School creating a small committee to work out these problems and report back to the group?" The group fell into one of those unplanned and reflective silences that often occur after a resonating truth has been echoed through the room. The group agreed, a committee was formed, and a report was made in the following meeting from a student committee. Eventually, it was agreed that no change would be made to the policy.

Our student government—called TORCH: Togetherness, Open-mindedness, Respect, Compassion, and Heart—allows students to learn to communicate effectively, make group decisions, experience the value of including divergent perspectives, and begin to understand how to feel the energy, direction, or spirit of a group. Student leaders are nominated and selected through Quaker

practice, and they run class meetings and whole school meetings as Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business. All students learn about terms like sense of the meeting, consensus, continuing revelation, and more.

This clerk learned how to sense the energy of the group and proposed a solution about which everyone in the room could unite. There was no prompting by teachers, no handbook from which the student learned the skill, and although this clerk had experienced some training, this decision was largely made on "feel." Perhaps most impressive was the fact that, throughout the entire meeting, our clerk recognized that the power existed in the group, not in the clerk — a hard lesson among adult and student leaders alike.

Providing real-life experiences, like participating in Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business, are key components of a Quaker curriculum. Along with our theme-based classroom curriculum, based on the testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality, our student government is designed to give our students a real taste of what it feels like to participate in a community decision. Along the way, we hope that our students will transfer these important collaborative skills into their daily lives.

Here are some reflections from one of last year's co-clerks that were included in his graduation speech:

Greene Street Friends has taught me that all voices should be heard. At the beginning of the school year, Christine and I were chosen by the student body to lead TORCH and our Student Meeting for Business. I had no idea what to expect. As a student, I had an unbelievable time being involved in something and making decisions that could drastically change the school. Greene Street Friends is one of the few out there that will listen to a student on this level of action.

Quaker Leadership Program

— John McKinstry, Westtown School

Westtown School (Pennsylvania) was established in 1799 by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to provide a guarded education for Quaker children. As part of this core mission, Westtown three years ago initiated a Quaker Leadership Program. This program, modeled on a similar program at Guilford College, is open to all upper school students and seeks to deepen students' spiritual lives, develop friendships and teach effective Quaker leadership skills. Currently attended by about 25-35 students, it meets for two hours on a Sunday evening twice a month. Each meeting has two components: the first is designed to develop a sense of community and affection for one another through games, food, and fellowship. Second, we focus on specific skills. The skills we have worked on include clerking a business meeting, being a recording clerk, writing minutes, clearness committees, effective vocal ministry, and social action on issues such as fair trade, spiritual formation, Quaker Biblical exegesis, and organization of the upcoming "Friends Schools Day of the Earth." The QLP has been very successful in developing a strong sense of community and identity among our Quaker students, and in enhancing their leadership skills through planning and facilitation of each monthly event. A grant from the Tyson Fund has made it possible to implement local, national and international workcamps for QLP students.



Quaker Self-Study & A Quaker Feast

— Lee Payton,
William Penn Charter School

At the urging of outgoing head of school Earl Ball, and with strong support from the Board of Overseers and the administration, the **William Penn Charter School** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) community took up a Quaker Self-Study in 2006–07. Under the guidance of the WPC Quaker self-study committee, teachers, parents, alumni, and students sought to examine the beliefs and practices that make our school a Friends school, to identify the positive aspects of Quakerism at our school, as well as aspects that needed improvement. We also saw the self-study as an opportunity for the community to learn more about Quakerism.

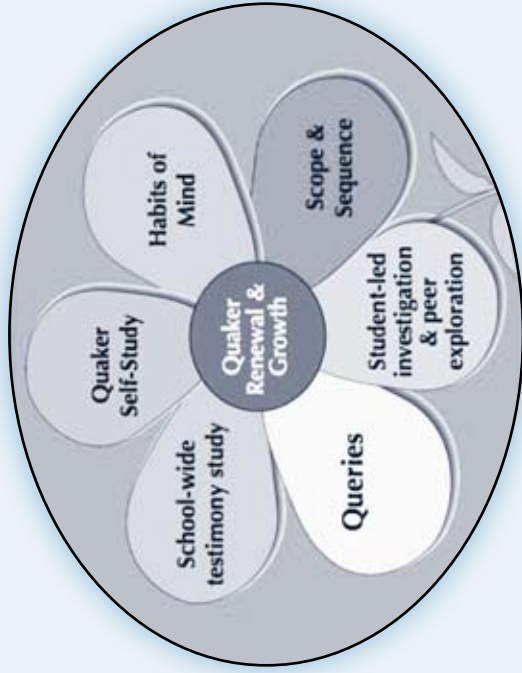
With the help of the Friends Council's Quaker Renewal Work Group and its clerk Rich Nourie, we began our effort by identifying queries that would help us survey various constituent groups in our community (parents, alumni, faculty, staff, and students). The queries were used in faculty and staff discussion groups, parent community meetings, and discussions among students. We also developed surveys from the queries for parents and alumni.

We gained important feedback about the Quaker life at our school from people outside of our community. Visiting educators from other Quaker schools, including **Germantown Friends**, **Westtown**, and **Friends Select**, spent time in each division. Each visitor provided valuable feedback about our strengths and possible areas of improvement. In addition to providing a space for reflection and dialogue, we also took part in a "feast" of Quakerism (a term coined by Rich Nourie). This "feast" of several visiting speakers, forums, and events, provided rich learning experiences about Quakerism for our community.

The process revealed that Quaker beliefs and practices are highly valued throughout the school community and affirmed the centrality of Quakerism in the School's overall mission. Feedback from the self-study has already inspired changes in our athletic program, solidified plans for regular Meeting for Worship for parents, and influenced ongoing discussions about curriculum and pedagogy throughout the school. The results of the self-study will help to guide our work in the years ahead.

Reflections

Quaker Renewal Work Group



Examples of many paths to Quaker Renewal for Friends Schools

As a result of maturation of the Friends Council and its Board, and in recognition of the ways in which we can be most useful to Friends schools, the Council's former Quaker Self-Study Committee has transformed into the Quaker Renewal Work Group. This group, comprised of administrators and faculty at many Friends schools across the country, serves in an advisory and clearness capacity to schools that are exploring ways to sharpen and deepen life as Quaker institutions.

In addition to the Quaker self-study process, the Council has noticed that, in practice, Friends schools are finding many creative and inspiring ways that promote Quaker growth and renewal for their communities. The Work Group recently shared highlights of renewal processes for the spiritual life of Friends schools. I pass these examples along to all readers as inspiration for our work together across Friends schools:

- **Abington Friends School's** exploration for a business meeting structure for staff to thresh issues surrounding staff professional development, staff engagement in the school's thematic studies, and equity and benefits issues.
- **Cambridge Friends School's** Faith & Practice and parent series.
- **Friends Select's** Quaker Scope and Sequence.
- **Germantown Friends School's** curricular study, development of a school Faith & Practice, and their upper school students writing their own honor code through a Quaker process of discernment and deliberation.
- **Greenwood Friends School's** parent series on Quakerism.
- **Greene Street Friends School's** professional development and curricular design.
- **Westtown's** language for its lower school Quakerism program, and the School Committee's use of worship sharing as a regular group exercise to build trust and share on a deep level.
- Formal all-school Quaker self-study at **William Penn Charter**.

These examples show creativity and continuing revelation for the process of Quaker Renewal by grade, division, or whole school community in our Friends schools. To request support from the Quaker Renewal Work Group, contact sarah@friendscouncil.org.

Sarah McHenry

Quaker Education

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Experiential Practice

WINTER 2008

Friends Council on Education
 1507 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102
 215.241.7245 • info@friendscouncil.org • www.friendscouncil.org

Friends Council Workshops and Peer Network Events 2008

Workshops

Educators New to Quakerism at Rendle Hill

Three separate offerings

January 30-February 1, 2008

February 21-22, 2008

May 8-9, 2008

Clerking: Facilitating Quaker Decision-Making in a Friends School at Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, Monday, February 11, 2008

Governance Matters! for Trustees & Heads of Friends schools

April 19 Connecticut Friends School, Wilton, CT

April 26 Lincoln School, Providence, RI

May 3 New Garden Friends School, Greensboro, NC

Past participants of Friends Council programs say . . .

"I rarely give everything a 10, but this was the best workshop I've ever attended."
 "A lively exchange of ideas and energized participation within a warm and friendly environment."

Peer Networks

Development Peer Network: May 6, 2008, Westtown School, PA

Early Childhood Educators: March 7, 2008, Media-Providence Friends School, PA

Friends Environmental Educators Network (FEEN): April 16-18, 2008, Carolina Friends School, Durham, NC

Librarians: March 10, 2008, William Penn Charter School, Philadelphia, PA

Public Relations Peer Network: May 20, 2008, Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, PA

GRANTS for Student Projects

Deadline: Friday, April 4, 2008

The Friends Council funds creative and experiential projects for students in Friends schools!

Grants of up to \$2,000 are available for projects that promote Quaker studies and the Quaker testimonies; collaborative efforts across classrooms; diversity and multiculturalism. See our Grants Gallery at friendscouncil.org for highlights of past projects, and proposal guidelines.

The Grant application deadline is completed in the Friday, April 4, for projects to be 2008-2009 school year.

Preserving, Inspiring, Strengthening . . . Friends Education

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