

Friends Council  
& Education

# Chronicles

OF QUAKER EDUCATION

## WINTER '99

### Embracing Diversity in Friends Schools

One of the most critical issues in Friends education today is advancing the diversity of our school communities. Diversity of economic background, race, and culture contribute richly to the fabric of all schools. The uniqueness of different cultures and the blend of values and perspectives which they bring are creating a new school community that will far transcend what we have had in the past. A homogenous school cannot prepare students for the multicultural society of the 21st century. However, diversity can increase the potential for conflict and tension.

As Juan Williams, author and journalist, has said, "Too many people, black and white, are happy with the idea that the civil rights movement is history; it means that they don't have to face what remains to be done." Are Friends schools afraid to look at what remains to be done? Do we even know what the next steps are? Some Friends educators are using Quaker beliefs to guide them in their quest to build communities which celebrate and embrace diversity.

Friends School of Atlanta, a K-8 school, was started in 1991. Currently, 35% of the students are African-American; 5% are Hispanic. The Atlanta Friends Monthly Meeting wanted to build a school, but many of the members had been through the civil rights movement. They thought of private schools as "white flight" schools. Sally MacEwan, part of the founding team of the school and current Board member explained, "We knew if we were to build a school it had to look like Atlanta in terms of racial and ethnic makeup. We needed to have a diverse community from the beginning rather than later to say, 'How can I add more black people to my white school?' "

The mission statements of the school clearly reflect the beliefs of the school and its commitment to diversity. There is no admissions testing, but rather teachers' evaluate students to see if the school has the resources to deal with the varied ability levels or special needs. 60% of students receive some form of financial aid. Adelaide Solomon Jordon, Board member replied, "When potential applicants really see what this school stands for, they may decide it is not for them. However, that does not lessen our commitment to our mission. We are creating a real life situation in this school that the children may not be living at home. But relationships develop, so kids who are different become friends. The parents then need to learn to interact and communicate with other parents that may be of a different racial or economic background. The school is always there to provide support."

Waman French, head of school, explained. "I believe the greatest gift we can give our kids is the opportunity to work with teachers and peers in a multifaceted diverse community. This experience in life is rare. We are giving our students the basic tools to communicate across differences. If they learn these skills and learn to respect each other at a young age, they have tools to work against the prejudices with which many of us were brought up. We are teaching them how to live in a diverse community."

Pam Upchurch, first grade teacher agreed. "We spend a lot of time discussing the social curriculum here at the school -- how do we treat each other. We use discussions, role plays, and really develop a code of conduct for behavior towards each other." The school recently went through a year long community-wide focus on white privilege. Using facilitators from universities around Atlanta, and readings such as "Unpacking the Backpack of White Privilege" by Peggy McIntosh, the community explored the benefits which those who are white naturally enjoy and probably take for granted.

As Karen Morris, Director of Curriculum, summarized, "The efforts to create a diverse community, have taken a lot of hard work on the part of everyone over the last ten years, but it has been definitely worth it. Where else could we get the chance to interact with all different kinds of people and have the support to, not only communicate through the differences, but learn to celebrate them as well."

At Cambridge Friends School, a PreK - 8 school in Cambridge MA, diversity is an outgrowth of respect for others and the belief in the sacredness within. "Quakerism makes it easy to work on diversity issues," said Laraine Morin, middle school head. "But you have to give people time to overcome their fear and build trust. Kids and parents come to us from all different places."

Anne Nash, interim head of the school reports, "This has been a ten year process. The school was deliberately built in a working class neighborhood with a housing project nearby. The founders asked themselves, 'What should a Quaker school look like?' The school should mirror life as it should be, not as it is." The school used the Multicultural Assessment Program (MAPP), sponsored by the National Association of Independent Schools, to evaluate itself. The board and administration realized that much work had to be done and asked itself the question "What do we have to do to make people of color welcome?"

Mary Johnson, one of the founders of the school and a former head (who is still on the Board and Co-Clerk of the Anti-Racism Committee) was instrumental in moving the school, not only towards prioritizing diversity, but anti-racism as well. The work began by the trustees reallocating resources into the effort. Every single person who works for the school, including the school crossing guard, goes through anti-racism training.

"The reality for people of color is that racism is systemic in our society. You cannot just approach the topic of diversity positively because it does not validate the reality of racism. A school has to do the anti-racist work before you can do the equity work and build community," clarified Laraine.

Towards the goal of anti-racism, CFS operates Affinity Groups for children of color in grades Pre-K through 5. The groups meet in three clusters: Asian kids, African-American kids, and Latino kids. A primary purpose of the group is to support the natural bond that children feel for people who look like them or who come from a similar cultural background. It helps the children to feel less alone, especially if they are the only one like them in a particular classroom. Explained Anne, "People sometimes feel that racial affinity groups go against the concept of integration. However, an anti-racist school needs to work against racism by honoring the needs of students who suffer from racism. These groups allow the kids to explore these experiences together and discover ways of coping."

Cambridge Friends Schools has also targeted bias in the area of sexual orientation. It all started in 1989 when a gay parent asked the school to be more proactive about gay and lesbian issues. He felt it was not enough just to stop kids when they were using abusive language around sexual

orientation. In the Fall of 1990, a Sexual Orientation Concerns Group was formed which began meeting with the head of school to develop a program.

"There was huge resistance to including sexual orientation in our anti-bias work," reported Helen McElroy, Lower School Head. "It really required all of us to examine our own attitudes. It took some brave individuals, lots of faculty time, reading, trainings, watching films, and dialogue. Some faculty asked if they could stand aside. The answer from the school community was 'No.' We wanted people to say its okay to love who you want to love and there is no judgment on that. Everyone should be able to be proud of their families."

In 1992, the school sponsored a school-wide Coming Out Day, later called Gay/Lesbian Pride Day, which included classroom meetings devoted to gay and lesbian issues, looking at types of families, and encouraging people to be themselves. In addition, an all-school assembly allowed gay and lesbian parents and teachers to speak to the school and songs were sung to celebrate taking pride in who we are. In 1994, Cambridge Friends School was highlighted in the film "It's Elementary - Talking about Gay Issues in Schools." (Available to rent from FCE) "Of course, the goal is not to need Gay Pride Day," said Helen, "but we are not there yet."

Both the Anti-Racism Committee and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Together (GLAST) Committee are committees of the Board and both support and challenge the school community. Anne Nash explains, "Anti-bias is integrated into everything everyone does here -- in all grades from Pre-K to 8th, and in all subject material. It is extremely important who the school hires because everyone must be able to espouse our mission. As a community, you have to make creating and maintaining diversity and eliminating bias a priority. There is no other way."

"The reality for people of color is that racism is sytemic in our society. You cannot just approach the topic of diversity positively because it does not validate the reality of racism. A school has to do the anti-racist work before youu can do the equity work and build community,"clarifeid Laraine.

Cambridge Friends Schools has also targeted bias in the area of sexual orientation. It all started in 1989 when a gay parent asked the school to be more proactice about gay and lesbian issues. He felt it was not enough just to stop kids when they were using abusive language around sexual orientation. In the Fall of 1990, a Sexual Orientation Concerns Group was formed which began meeting with the head of school to develop a program.

"There was huge resistance to including sexual orientaion in our anti-bias work" reported Helen McElroy, Lower School Head. It really required us all to examine our own attitudes. It took some brave individuals, lots of faculty time, reading, trainings, watching fims and dialogue. Some faculty asked if they could stand aside. The answer from the school community was 'No'. We wanted people to say oits okay to love who you wnat to love and there is no judgement on that. Everyone should be able to be proud of their families."

In 1992, the school sponsored a school-wide Coming Out Day later called Gay Pride Day which included classroom meetings devoted to gay and lesbian issues, types of families, and supporting people to be themselves. In addition, an all-school aassembly allowed gay and lesbian parents and teachers to speak to the school and songs were sung to celebrate the taking pride in who we are. In 1994, Cambridge Friends School was highlighted in a film "It's Elementary - Talking about Gay issues in Schools." (Available to rent from FCE) "Of course, the goal is not to need Gay Pride Day," said Helen, "but we are not there yet."

Both the Anti-Racism Committee and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Together GLAST Committee are Board Committees which both support and challenge the school community. Anne Nash explains, "Anti-bias is integrated into everything everyone does here in all grades from Pre-K to 8th and in all subject material. It is extremely important who the school hires because everyone must be able to espouse our mission. As a community, you have to make creating and maintaining diversity and eliminating bias a priority. There is no other way."

Don't Forget To Register for the FCE National Gathering,

**"Embracing the Tension: Diversity in Friends Education"**

April 8 & 9, 1999 in Philadelphia.

Keynote Speaker: Juan Williams, Author and Journalist

Small Group Discussions on diversity issues in your school  
and problem-solving on how to move forward.

Call FCE for more information or registration materials.

**Service Learning: An Interview with Stephanie Judson**

**Q:** What is community service learning? What do you prefer to call it?

**A:** In 1977, I started to work on integrating, what we called, "community service" into the Religious Thought program at Friends Select; now I prefer the term "service learning." The shift that the phrase suggests is that it is not just a one way street. Service learning implies that everyone is learning in the process, those who are working and the people in the community with whom they are having contact. It also means that service is part of the learning process in the school.

**Q:** So it is not just a thing that you tack on because it is a good thing to do?

**A:** No. In fact, just recently, a student in class voiced concern that she felt as if some of her classmates were leaving their service work, patting themselves on the back, and then forgetting about it. I explained the concept of noblesse oblige and I wrote that on one end of the board. I wrote service learning on the other end of the board. We talked about the continuum and about trying to make the shift. In addition, I am constantly trying to make the connection for the students between service and academics.

**Q:** Is that an important element of service learning? What do you see happening when the students come back to the classroom?

**A:** Here is an example of something that worked well in a 5th grade classroom, even though it wasn't planned. In science class, the children were learning about weather. Then, because Hurricane Mitch tore through parts of Central America, it became part of their study. The students really wanted to be able to do something to help and they started collecting shoes and clothes to donate to the American Friends Service Committee for a shipment to Honduras. The science

teacher brought in a speaker to show slides about her experience being caught in the hurricane in Nicaragua. The project and the learning began to grow. It wasn't planned, but the teacher really believes that it is important to integrate service into the learning process, and seized the opportunity.

The ninth graders at Friends Select help to choose their own projects. We excuse students from class once a month, from the middle of ninth grade to the middle of tenth grade. My role is like the knot in the bow tie, with the school being one bow, and the community being the other. I am the link between the two. Each project that we establish has to work both for our students as a learning experience, and for the community in that our students must be able to really be of use.

**Q:** What kinds of things do the students learn?

**A:** After their service mornings, I ask the students what questions they have and we encourage the students to go back to the site and try to get the answers the next time they go. They also write about their experiences. Last year, the students had some particular questions about public education and housing in Philadelphia. The questions came from their work with Hunter School in Norris Square, which is a K - 4th grade school in the Spanish-speaking part of Kensington, and from their work with Community Home Repair, which works with volunteers to repair the houses of poor and elderly people. I put together a panel of experts on housing and education who came in to talk to the students about the inequities they were seeing. For example, the students asked, "Why do I see boarded up houses when there are so many homeless people?"

Last year, there was an Educational Summit in Philadelphia and some of our students went because they had been volunteering at Hunter School. When they came back, they reported to the rest of the class and wrote about their experiences. The organizer for that conference came and spoke to the whole group.

Our students at Hunter School volunteer in classrooms and establish relationships with the children and their teachers. I also try to have them learn about the resources of the neighborhood. After we finish a morning of volunteering, we visit different organizations in the area to find out what people in the neighborhood need and what services are offered.

The committee planning an inservice day for the faculty realized that we needed to be doing something together, rather than just talking. Ninety faculty and staff worked in 10 different places in the community, including all the places where our students work. The faculty could really see what the students were experiencing and relate it to their subject matter. The 6th grade teacher and the foreign language teacher worked at Hunter School and came back and said, "This would be wonderful for beginning level Spanish." The sixth grade class is going to go to Hunter School and the parents of Hunter School students are going to speak Spanish to the group while they cook some traditional Puerto Rican food together. The 3rd graders from Hunter School who are bilingual are going to help translate for the 6th graders.

**Q:** What is your advice to a school beginning a community service program?

**A:** First, keep it simple. Then, whoever is going to be responsible for the program has to have time to organize the work and make the logistics happen. The teachers are in the classroom and have a hard time adding that piece on to their other duties. If the school wants service learning to be an ongoing part of the school program, they need to allow a person to do it as a job, even if only part-

time. It is also important to define the role of that person. Part of my role at Friends Select is to provide ideas and opportunities to teachers and do some of the early logistical work to get a project going so that the teacher can eventually take over.

**Q:** What do schools do in rural areas?

**A:** There are things going on in any community, even if it is e-mail correspondence between a school in Costa Rica and a school here. Rural poverty and needs are large. Friends Select is in the middle of the city and there are all kinds of opportunities to integrate the city into the classroom. That does not mean that you can't find opportunities in communities outside of the city.

Schools should allow students to experience the service together and then reflect, talk, write, or draw about it. In addition, one person on the staff cannot be responsible for everything that happens in service learning. It would be like having a chaplain for a Quaker school! The administration must believe that service learning is important enough to allocate resources of time and money. They need to make the expectation clear that other teachers will become involved. The community service coordinator is a resource for the school.

**Q:** Are there other important aspects of a successful program?

**A:** Last year, French-speaking residents from Logan Square East, a nearby retirement community, who speak French met with our French V students. They would watch movies and discuss them. That grew out of a long-standing relationship between Logan Square East and Friends Select in which we had many projects going on over time. I think that another thing that has been important is building long-standing relationships with institutions, instead of staging "one-shot" deals. Also, there are people on staff in most Friends schools who already have long-term relationships with non-profit service institutions in their personal lives. Those can be ready-made relationships for service learning for the school. The organizations themselves can often provide orientation to the issues involved. For example, the Greater Philadelphia Food Bank can come in and talk about hunger and the economics of hunger.

Students come to service learning from very different backgrounds. Two particular students come to mind. A young man named Michael who lives in a large house in a suburb was working in Norris Square. Michael was invited into the house of one of the kids. When we were driving back, he said, "I did some calculations about the square footage of that person's house and my house. I don't quite know what to make of it, but I am really thinking about it." Another student by the name of Dawn lives in a housing project in Camden. She worked at Community Home Repair for some time. She came to me once and said, "You know, what I learned at Community Home Repair, I have been using at home to fix-up my room."

### Service Learning

- Is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities.
- Is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program and the community.
- Helps foster civic responsibility.
- Is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the

students, or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled.

- Provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993

### Resources on Service Learning

Critical Issues in K-12 Service Learning; Published by the National Society for Experiential Education, 35089 Haworth Drive, Suite 207, Raleigh, North Carolina, 27609-7229; Telephone: 919-787-3263.

Learning By Giving: K-8 Service-Learning Curriculum Guide; Published by the National Youth Leadership Council, 1910 W. County Road B, St. Paul, MN, 55113-1337; Telephone: 612-631-3672

Learning Links: Curricular Resource Guide for Service Learning in Grades 4-8; Published by Linking San Francisco, c/o Aptos Middle School, 105 Aptos Avenue, Room 341, San Francisco, CA 94127; Telephone: 415-4524651; e-mail: linkingsf1@aol.com

## The Road to Simplicity

It all started with an assignment in "Think Locally, Act Locally," an experiential course offered at Olney Friends School. Olney is a boarding high school in Barnesville, Ohio, set amid the hill farms and apple orchards of eastern Ohio, ninety miles west of Pittsburgh. The course was led by Loren Pierce-Coleman, a staffperson from the Center for Plain Living and former teacher at Olney. The Center, housed on the Olney School campus, is a non-profit educational organization devoted to promoting the life of plain people as an alternative to America's technologically dependent, fast-paced, mainstream lifestyle. During the year, the students had studied capitalism, socialism, and other economic systems. They had examined the pros and cons of globalization as well as reliance on the local economy. They read Bill Gates's autobiography, *The Road Ahead*. They discussed ways in which they could live more simply.

Of course, simplicity and hard work are core values that have been practiced at Olney Friends School since its inception in 1837. All cleaning and maintenance work at the school are done by Olney students and staff. Olney also operates a 200-acre farm on the campus, and students are responsible for milking and feeding the cows, picking up hay bales, and harvesting the crops.

During the winter, Scott Savage, Director of the Center, asked the four students in the course to create a unique, exciting, and affordable event for their high school peers and teachers that would allow them to explore the benefits of localization. "We wanted to do something that would reconnect young people to the places where they live and get them thinking about the vital task of regrowing their local economy," explained Loren. "We wanted them to know that there is an alternative to the global competitiveness model which assaults kids today. Young people can find community, simplicity, and meaningful work right where they live."

The students, Kyla Hilton, Kathryn Hunninen, Jenni Robertson, and Doug Terry, created "Think Locally: Rebuilding Local Economies and Communities, A Conference for High School Students & Their Teachers." They did everything to make the conference a reality, including planning the structure of the conference, developing ideas for workshops, scheduling speakers and workshop leaders, organizing publicity, and registering participants. The students were even panelists in a

workshop, sharing their efforts to live more simply with conference participants. What did they think about organizing a national conference? "We must have changed the schedule a hundred times," laughed Jenni. "We had to learn to be really flexible."

The conference practiced what it preached -- only locally grown and processed food was on the menu. "The hardest thing was finding local food," said Doug, who was in charge of procurement. "Even the local baker has to purchase ingredients at Sam's Club in order to stay in business. I just took out the phone book and started calling local businesses and asking them how they related to the community. It was impossible to get fresh vegetables because the conference took place in May. The tomatoes and lettuce came from a greenhouse."

Eric Mayer, a religion teacher at Westtown School, brought twenty Westtown high school students to the conference. The Westtown students especially valued their conversations with Art Gish and Scott Savage, two individuals who have made commitments to intentional religious communities and have chosen a plain life, free of technology. "The concept of community has lost its meaning in our society," explained Eric. "We call everything a community, including suburban neighborhoods where people don't know each other. The students really wrestled with the deeper meaning of community and whether a school where people are kind of forced to be together was a real community or not."

"The most rewarding thing at the conference was hearing other teenagers discussing the issues at meals or at breaks," commented Jenni. "I think the conference really had an impact on many of the students who attended." Eric agreed. "These kids recognize the inherent emptiness in our 'Styrofoam culture' as they call it. They feel the lack of faith and the cynicism and pessimism. They are really hungering for an alternative".

### It Takes A Village

Many Friends schools have developed joint service projects with retirements homes to the mutual benefit of both the seniors and the children. One such school, United Friends School, a small K - 8 school in rural Bucks county in Quakertown, PA has enjoyed such a relationship with Chandler Hall. Chandler Hall, a Friends retirement home provides health care services and assisted living for the elderly. Children from United Friends would visit the elderly residents, put on performances, and act as companions. Also, seniors from the community at large would come to the school to tutor kids or work on join projects involving art or science.

Then, in 1997, out of the common Quaker faith of the two communities, a dream was born -- a dream that belied the small size of the school and its rural setting. That dream was to build an inter-generational learning community. The school and retirement communities asked the question, "What if you physically combined a school for children with an adult day care facility and provided an alliance between old and young? What would happen if the older adults could play an integral part in the curriculum by sharing learning experiences with students and teachers on a daily basis?"

As Betty Sue Zellner, head of United Friends reported, "As Quaker organizations, there was no difference really in our mission and goals. We were both dedicated to empower all individuals in the community to attain their fullest potentials and to encourage individual self-worth, cooperative learning, care for one another, and a sense of responsibility in the affairs of the community. This was a very strong foundation from which to form the beginnings of our dream."

In April, 1997, the UFS community held a joint visioning session with Chandler Hall. Out of this



came a mission statement entitled, "A Venture in Collaborative Living." The two organizations envisioned a neighborhood concept with adult day care rooms next to classrooms. Each "neighborhood" would also have a joint kitchen area, living room, and science/wet/messy area for joint projects. Sharon Dreese, Director of Development, explained, "We held a staff brainstorming session and just became more and more excited about the infinite possibilities of integrating the seniors into the curriculum and creating a true collaborative learning environment for everyone."

In addition to the "neighborhoods", there would be overall community space including an art room, gym, pool, meetinghouse, library, computer center, and performance space. The educational curriculum would include the seniors in daily mentoring, tutoring, aiding in the classroom, and joint field trips. As Kathy Leber, first grade teacher at UFS explained, "Living and working together will allow real relationships to be formed between three generations. Who says a seven-year-old can't have a friend who is seventy?"

Betty Sue agrees. "In our society today, there is a tendency not to see those who are wrinkled. Often, it is because our older relatives live half a continent away or the elderly in our communities live lives that are separate from young families. We are so excited about sharing a campus with elder friends in a real Quaker learning community. I think we will all feel a sense of joy and well-being that comes from being part of an extended family that cares for one another."

The next step in the venture was to find a location that would meet all the program needs of both organizations. Currently, United Friends School is operating on two separate campuses and would like to bring the school community together while including some additional space to grow. Chandler Hall wanted to build a satellite community for seniors that could provide a continuum of health care for older adults. In June 1997, after months of searching, the Property Search Committee, made up of both communities, found a 64 acre farm that possessed the charm and the landscape compatible with nature walks, environmental studies, gardening, recreational activities, and many other opportunities for incidental meetings among seniors, teachers, and children. Chandler Hall purchased the land and made settlement on January 15, 1998.

What is the next step? "Well," said Sharon Dreese, "Of course, our Development Committee is gearing up for a major capital campaign to raise the money to pay for this vision. Whenever I feel the lump beginning to form in my throat and the perspiration clinging to my face at the overwhelming thought of this venture, I think of the many leaps of faith our school has taken over the last fifteen years and I feel like we can do this. I also console myself with the reminder given by parent and member of the Long-Range Planning Committee John McFarland who said, 'How do you eat an elephant? One piece at a time!'"

