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## Faith and Experience in Education: Essays from Quaker Perspectives (Book Review)

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## **Faith and Experience in Education: Essays from Quaker Perspectives**

Rowe, Don, Anne Watson, Editors, Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Threntham Books, 1 May 2018, \$41.95, pbk, ISBN 9781858568386, 256pp.

Although most people are concerned with the care and nurturing of children in schools, perhaps no group is more qualified to speak to this issue than the Quakers. In *Faith and Experience in Education: Essays from Quaker Perspectives*, we find essays emerging from conversations conducted by the Quaker Values in Education Group in Britain. This book, edited by Don Rowe and Anne Watson, contains essays from 12 authors, including Rowe and Watson themselves. In the Introduction, they note that “. . . education should serve the spiritual purpose of enlarging young people’s awareness of, and capacity to promote, the good” (p. 4). Each essay contributes to one or more of five themes: authenticity, care and love, trust, equality and justice, or spirituality, that support children’s processes of learning and becoming whole people who promote good in the world.

In the title of the first essay, Don Rowe asks, “Whose values? Which values?” (p. 11). This essay is foundational to understanding the stance of each author in the essays that follow. Views on moral education of children change over time, and the essays in this book assume that classroom teachers are key to the moral education of children. Rowe notes that “A primary task of the curriculum. . . is to encourage young people to think more deeply and sensitively about the moral issues underlying human relationships and interactions . . .” (p. 12). Each succeeding essay chronicles learning experiences in schools that provide opportunity for the children to mature. Rowe discusses virtues-based and rights-based approaches to moral education, including the Quaker practices of silence and reflection applied to schools. He connects these practices to more widespread use of “mindfulness” in schools. This essay, as do others, has a significant list of footnotes and references that provide more resources for those who might be interested in the original questions.

One of the most compelling essays, “Building, Maintaining, and Repairing a Peaceful Culture in School,” describes the West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project (WMQPEP). The author says, “It delivers peace education . . . that develop[s]

social and emotional learning, and furthers understanding of how to resolve conflict creatively” (p. 57). The project employs a whole-school approach to building, maintaining, and repairing relationships. The focus is on “positive peace” rather than “. . . negative peace [which] is the absence of violence . . .” (p. 59). The essay includes theory, general methods, and specific examples of school activities that engender a peaceful community.

Although most of the essays are not directly connected to particular disciplines, two are more specific: “Equality, Truth, and Love in Subject Teaching: Cognitive Care in the Case of Mathematics” and “The Role and Value of the Arts in Education.” Mathematics is sometimes seen as a discipline that is primarily about right and wrong answers. Anne Watson provides a compelling argument that the themes of equality, truth, and care are all of great importance in mathematics teaching and learning. In a subject where being wrong happens frequently, the teacher has a responsibility to foster resilience and curiosity in students. On the other hand, arts education clearly provides many opportunities for children to develop an understanding of equity and truth. In relation to Quaker practices, Janet Sturge notes that, “Arts education addresses Quaker commitment to peace through offering ways to create balance and resolve contrast and dissonance” (p. 135). The integration of Quaker practices in the classroom seems natural.

Woven throughout the book is considerable history of Quakerism and how Quaker practices have influenced thinking about education in the past several centuries. Two essays in particular, “Early Years Education and Quaker Concerns” and “Equality and the Scramble for School Places,” build on historic Quaker principles to explicate how government and political entities have influenced education in ways that sometimes support Quaker practices and more often in ways that violate Quaker principles of equity and inclusion. Janet Nicholls, in the latter essay, says “The politicization and marketization of schooling leads to children and young people being treated as economic units” (p. 164). She is concerned that competition for access and scholarships are misaligned with equity initiatives. This in turn breeds competition between parents for limited space in the schools most capable of educating their children for better lives.

This book appears to be written for primary school educators, but it has significant application for all schooling from nursery school to graduate school.

It should resonate with any educator who desires to foster peaceful communities.

The book may also appear to be written just for Quakers from a Quaker perspective, but it has broad applications in a time in history that social encounters can be anything but peaceful.

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