Faith and Experience in Education. Essays from Quaker perspectives, edited by Don Rowe and Anne Watson, London, UCL Institute of Education Press, 2018, 242pp, £24.99 pbk,
ISBN 978-1-85856-838-6

I approached the book as someone who has had a long-standing interest in spirituality and education and the debate about faith schools, but who knew very little at all about the Religious Society of Friends. Indeed, I knew little more than that some prominent Quakers (such as Elizabeth Fry and Joseph Rowntree) had played important roles in social reform in the 19th Century, and that Quaker acts of collective worship are characterized by simplicity and silence. I was in part drawn to review the book by the possibility that, when I had read it, my knowledge in this regard would no longer be so lamentable. While some progress has been made on that front, it is clear that for a reader seeking a comprehensive account of Quakerism - or even a systematic introduction to the faith - this is not the place to start.

For this is not a a book whose focus is religion. Nor is it a book about religious education in the conventional sense. And it is certainly not the educational manifesto of a particular religious group. Rather, as the title and subtitle make clear, it is a book in which the contributors, all of whom subscribe to the Quaker faith, reflect on their own experience in examining their varying perspectives on schools and the mission of teaching. Its strengths - and it has many - include the firm grounding of the contributors' educational thought in their personal experience, both as seekers of Truth and as teachers, their clear conviction that knowledge and understanding are *always* provisional and that we all live with uncertainty, and the consequent humility with which they approach their topic, even when they are arguing with passion for the need for educational reform.

There are thirteen chapters, including the editors' opening statement which provides a brief introduction to Quakerism, positions contemporary Quaker education historically from the mid-17th Century, and identifies some key themes which are discussed in what follows: *authenticity*; *care and love*; *trust* ; *equality and justice*; and *spirituality*. This is followed by a substantial essay by one of the editors, Don Rowe (co-founder of the Citizenship Foundation) which provides both a history of the contentious issue of the place of values (which ones? whose?) in English schooling, a consideration of rights- and virtues-based approaches and their implications for the curriculum, and how all this marries with some core Quaker values: *peace*; *equality*; *justice*; *truth*; *integrity*; *simplicity*; and *concern for the environment* (p. 29).

But espousing such values is clearly not enough. An important Quaker concept throughout the book is that of *testimony* which, according to its 17th Century founder, George Fox, is 'to be made through action .... [and thus].... a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life' (p. 139).

Justice is the subject of Belinda Hopkins's chapter. While the concept of *restorative justice* is the focus - it is nicely contrasted with the traditional, authoritarian, coercive and punishment-focused culture of most schools, not least in the very different mind-sets of teachers (p.48) - she advocates a whole-school approach to restorative change characterized by *relational justice.* The point is well-taken: that for justice to endure, it needs to be embodied in mutually caring and respectful relationships which permeate the whole school, and this requires a paradigm change which will not happen overnight. Such a regime will, of course, be characterized by *peaceful* relations, and this is the focus for Chapter 4 in which Anna Gregory describes the whole-school Peace Education project in the West Midlands known as 'Peacemakers'. Relationships are pivotal and require *building*, *maintaining* and *repairing*; as Gregory says: 'Peace is a *process*, a *practice* and must be continually attended to' (p.75). Restorative approaches to conflict (out of which growth happens) have an important part to play in this.

Tim Small's essay in Chapter 5 is the most research-focused paper in the book, providing a reflective account of research which began with the Learning Power project at the University of Bristol in the early 2000s. Drawing on Kelly's *personal construct theory*, a profiling tool (CLARA) was developed which identifies eight dimensions to the process of learning. Small shows how this can identify the characteristics and preconditions for *authentic learning* which 'challenges the status quo because it is anchored in personal interest rather than didactic intent' (p.95). This is (as the chapter heading puts it): 'learning for emancipation'.

According to Anne Watson in Chapter 6, 'Quaker discussions about education usually avoid talking about subject teaching and instead focus on pastoral care, peripheral activities, peacefulness, good citizenship, caring personalities, peaceful schools and communities, the value of self-expression, liberal arts and RE teaching' (p.103). I suspect most readers of the Journal would applaud these emphases as an important corrective to the dominance of concern for the 'basics' and the easily measurable in the curriculum. But Watson stresses that teaching and learning of subject knowledge is 'the heart of schools' (ibid), and goes on to use mathematics to demonstrate the importance of what she terms 'cognitive care' and good subject-teaching as being as much testimonies of love and truth as anything in the pastoral curriculum.

The Quaker testimonies of truth and equality are foci also for Janet Sturge's essay (Chapter 7) on the role and value of the arts in education. Here (as elsewhere), we are reminded that truth 'is much more than literal fact' (p.125), with the Quaker attitude to the search for meaning and understanding premised on the provisionality and variability of truth(s). This is something which can be realised and expressed through the creative arts. In a sentence which should be written over the door of every school in the land, and chiselled into the stonework at the Department for Education, she says: 'A young person is firstly human, and their worth as a future economic unit should not dominate their upbringing and childhood experience' (ibid).

This is a sentiment much in evidence in Wendy Scott's largely autobiographical chapter which follows. Here we have a fascinating account of the personal and professional experience of one who often found herself at loggerheads with the developments of the 1980s and 1990s, where the authoritarian imposition of curricula and a regime of testing and accountability undermined the enlightened ethos of the 1960s and 1970s, but who has remained doggedly involved in those parts of education where she can have some influence. I found her account of the enduring obstinacy and dogmatism of the government and its agents along the way (for example, the insistence over the last few years on baseline assessment in the reception year, (p.154)), impossible to read without becoming angry.

The progressive tradition of schooling is revisited by Keir Mitchell in Chapter 11. Like Scott, he describes the struggle he had to square his personal (Quaker) values with the system in which he was trying to teach, and how he resolved the conflict by becoming a home-educator and forest schooler. As I read this chapter, I found the resonance with the progressives and de-schoolers of the '60s and '70s (John Holt; Ivan Illich etc - though he does not reference them), ringing in my ears.

Anger can also be an appropriate reaction to the politics beneath the education system as considered in Janet Nicholls in Chapter 9. The Quaker value in the spotlight here is *equality*, seen particularly in the concept of equality *of opportunity*. I found her model of a 'polarity of perspectives' (p. 167) on what this means for different people a very useful way into understanding the mess we are in. I was reminded that when I taught sociology, I used the word 'system' to denote 'a whole whose parts are functionally interrelated'; Nicholls's account of the status quo with its 'bewildering assortment of options in the school marketplace' (p. 165) confirmed for me that whatever today's ill-conceived 'free-for-all' is, it is definitely *not* a system!

Mathematics is again the context in Chapter 10, where John Mason reflects on forty years of teaching mature students at the Open University. The presentation of ten 'pedagogical actions' (e.g. 'specializing and generalizing' and 'talking in pairs') epitomises the strength of a book which establishes its values through the careful analysis of the practices through which they are lived and in which they are embodied.

The final essay is by Giles Barrow, and this is perhaps the most theoretical and philosophical chapter in the book, drawing on the works of Grace Jantzen, John Macmurray and Hannah Arendt to advance the concept of *natality* as central to Quaker perspectives on education. For Barrow, natality encapsulates notions of 'birth, becoming, renewal and beginning' (p. 217), and is embodied in the Quaker vision of education as involving 'the gradual unfolding of personhood, in direct communion within a sense of place and relationship with others...' (p. 216). There are, he argues, some key features of natality (*relationality; embodiment; fourishing; intimacy; co-creativity;* and *betwixt & between* [uncertainty]), which feed into a notion of teaching and learning as bringing about 'a kind of birth' (p. 229). This is a way of thinking which, for me, evokes the pedagogy of Friedrich Froebel, and is a much needed foil to the dehumanized schooling that has come to dominate.

The book concludes with a brief but thoughtful commentary by Kathy Bickmore on the essays and some core themes which have emerged throughout them.

Don Rowe and Anne Watson have done an excellent job in assembling this collection of well-written, balanced but incisive essays, and the overall quality of the papers testifies to their skill and experience as writers and editors. With or without the specific orientation to Quaker perspectives, what these essays have to say about schools, teaching and the mission of education is timely and thought-provoking. Whatever one's view of Quakerism (or of the appropriateness of relating education to religion more generally), the reader will find themselves moved to reflect critically on *their* faith and experience of education.

In reading this book and writing this review, I have learned a lot about the values, social conscience and educational philosophy of the Quakers, for which I am grateful. Whether I have leaned as much about Quakerism as a *religion*, is less certain, but I suspect the contributors would, in any case, dispute such a distinction.

Ron Best
School of Education
University of Roehampton

E-mail: ron@profronbest.co.uk