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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Quaker Schools

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This study examines the connection between Quaker faith and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in U.S. independent Quaker schools. It explores how DEI administrators articulate the role of Quaker philosophy, theology, and practice in their work. Using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, the research begins with a broad survey followed by qualitative interviews with DEI administrators. Findings indicate that Quaker schools' DEI efforts are influenced by Quaker values such as the inner light and the testimonies of community and stewardship. However, the concept of Quaker theology and the challenge of confronting historical biases present tensions. This study provides insights into the unique approach of Quaker schools to DEI and the complexities involved in aligning these efforts with Quaker beliefs.

Introduction

In the United States, members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) are known – to the extent that they are known – for a commitment to pacifism and social justice as highlighted in historical efforts against participation in war and the work to end slavery. To a lesser extent non-pastoral Friends are known for what is known as 'un-programmed worship,' a lack of clergy and for their meetings structured in circles where there is no set program, only silence, until one community member feels called by God to speak. In some regions of the country, particularly the Northeast United States, they are known for their independent schools. In these pockets we find schools where teachers are often referred to by their first names and where school activities feature a tug of peace rather than a tug of war. It is in Quaker independent schools that this study takes place, a study to understand the connection between Quaker faith and the ways in which Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (hereafter DEI) efforts are envisioned in these schools today.[1] This study, completed as part of the author's university promotion process, reveals that as schools grapple with the connection between the Quaker faith and DEI work, they are also engaged in deep identity work at the institutional level.

Review of the Literature

Quaker Origins

Today and historically, Quakers in the United States are generally known for their stances on equity and non-violence. Highlighting these themes, United States history books commonly cite Quakers as key members in the abolitionist movement and discuss the role of Quakers as conscientious objectors during war times Quakers – very broadly – are theologically united in the belief that, first, all individuals hold an inner light connecting them to God and, second, that it is through this light, that God continually reveals new truths to all people. According to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, the inner light is best understood 'as the inner certainty of our faith' and characterised as 'a direct, unmediated relationship' with God.[2] Because of the inner light connecting every person to God, Quakers believe that in times of spiritual communion, God reveals themself to individuals, guiding their conscience and decision making through the inner light and (sometimes) encouraging them to share revelations with others. To Quakers it is crucial that the capacity for revelation is

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[1] Notably, the data for this study was collected during a time when the United States Federal Government was supportive of multicultural education and related efforts. While the schools that were part of this study are 'independent', meaning that less of their funding comes from Federal, state or local governments, it is likely that we will see shifts in policy and practice from even these typically liberal leaning independent schools.

[2] See https://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/experience-and-faith/the-light-within/.

accessible to every individual, every individual is created in the image of God and thus shares that same connection and capacity for revelation–even those who don't define themselves as Christians.

Quakers and Theology

Because of the focus on individual revelation, Quakers have always had a unique relationship with the concept of religious doctrine and associated theologies. Though there have been many Quaker scholars and thinkers since the time of George Fox, many have avoided referring to their writing (or thoughts) as theology, under the assumption that theology *seems to them* both prescriptive and inaccessible, effectively restricting some from potential inner revelation. Other Quaker thinkers have strongly advocated that their work is, in fact, theological. Howard Brinton explained, 'many Friends shy away from theology', but he continued, 'we do not, or at least we do not profess to, shy away from thought. Yet the word "theology" means simply thinking or reasoning about God, and I am sure that most of us can hardly avoid some thinking about man's greatest object of thought.'[3] This thread has continued in modern theology, as Quaker thinkers grapple with how to be both inclusive and Christian at the same time. In writing about the inner light more recently, David Johnson explains, 'whether we know of it as Christ or whether it manifests itself through the natural world or through other messengers… we come to find that God is working within us, guiding, teaching, reproving, healing, and in effect striving to change us so we become purer of heart.'[4] Today, the Society of Friends today is so diverse in theological tradition that they include both Nontheist Quakers, those who follow many Quaker traditions and practices but identify as either atheist or agnostic, as well as Quakers who see themselves as Christians. In short, the Quaker religious conviction that the inner Light is accessible by every individual is so strong that even theological writings focussed on Christ find the need to leave space for nontheist pathways to remain true to their message.[5]

Though there is great diversity regarding the theological orientations of Quakers, there is much more coalescence on philosophy (colloquially defined as values) and practice. L. Hugh Doncaster, for example, explained that 'The heart of the Quaker message does not lie in a doctrine expressed in abstract terms, but in an experience of power and grace, known in our hearts and also related to the structure of the universe; known individually and also recognised as belonging to all, immanent.'[6] Even from

[3] Brinton, H., 'The place of Quakerism in modern Christian thought–Part 1, Friends Journal', 5/2 (1959), pp. 20–22,59.
[4] Johnson, D., 'The workings of the Spirit of God within', Pendle Hill Pamphlet 459, (2019), p. 3.
[5] Gwyn, D., '"But who do you say that I am?" Quakers and Christ today',Pendle Hill Pamphlet 426 (2014).
[6] Doncaster L. H, The Quaker Message: a Personal Affirmation Wallingford, Pa: Pendle Hill Publications, 1972, pp. 6–7.

the formation, many Quakers felt no need for doctrine, so unlike most Christian denominations, Quaker traditions lack sacraments, clergy and baptism. Moreover, according to W. A. Campbell Stewart, from the outset the Bible served only a 'consultative function' for many Quakers.[7] In today's Quaker practice, the use of and relationship to the Bible varies across Friends with some writing specifically about the 'Bible as something vibrant and filled with spiritual power'[8] and others relying solely on the writings of other Quakers and their own connection to Christ to guide their practices.

In terms of philosophy or values, Quakers share a common set of beliefs, otherwise known as testimonies, of simplicity, peace, integrity, equality, community and stewardship. These values are not necessarily unique to the Quaker faith, but together they provide the foundation of the Quaker identity. Through these testimonies, Quakers stress the inherent worth and equality of all individuals, and this foundational belief shapes their understanding of the value of diversity, the pursuit of equity, and the fostering of a sense of belonging within their communities. While there might not be a singular, universally accepted Quaker theology, due to the decentralised nature of the faith, there are common themes and principles – both theological and not – that underlie the Quaker perspective on each of these testimonies, particularly as those testimonies relate to social justice.

Quakers and Social Justice

Together, the Quaker testimonies on equality, community and integrity shape Quaker perspectives on social justice. An understanding of an inner Light in all individuals implies that there is clear, inherent value in each individual and equality of all people – deserving of equitable opportunities. This tenet forms the foundation for recognizing and valuing diversity, as it underscores the idea that no one person or group is superior to another – including both the oppressed and the oppressor. On integrity, Quakers believe that one should live in alignment with their inner Light. As it relates to social justice, it is important, therefore, for Quakers to not just believe in equality, but to act on that belief. Lastly, regarding community, the belief in the inner Light in all individuals leads directly to the belief in the inherent connection between all individuals. That inherent connection between individuals is important to the social justice perspective shared by most Quakers, but the testament of community goes even deeper. The Quaker value of community also includes the concept of communal discernment and decision-making, wherein diverse perspectives also contribute to a richer understanding of truth. Quaker practice is informed, whether acknowledged or not, by both theology and

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[7] Stewart W. A. C., Quakers and education, London: Epworth Press, 1953.

[8] Blood, P., Introduction, in Magruder, C. Gulizia, A. and Saxton, C, Walking with the Bible,. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 474 (2022), p. 2.

values, encouraging followers to recognise the divine spark within each person and to actively seek justice, equity, and inclusion in their communities–including inclusion in Quaker educational institutions.

The Quaker School's Commitment to Social Justice

In recent years, institutes of Higher Education throughout the United States have increasingly hired experts in DEI to increase educational equity at their institutions and improve student experiences on campus.[9] This trend, like many in higher education, has been reflected increasingly in elementary and secondary public and private schools with 62% of the country's largest districts employing Directors of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.[10] In the wake of George Floyd's killing and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, many of the schools that did not already have a diversity official on staff created such roles internally in their schools, others hired additional staff. Many of these positions were created in response to public pressure. For example, in the summer of 2020, an Instagram account called *BlackMainlineSpeaks*[11] was created to anonymously post the stories of Black students in Philadelphia area schools. The public attention created by this account drove many schools, both Quaker and not, to issue statements and engage in specific diversity programming including hiring diversity directors.[12] The role of this director varies across schools and districts including–but not limited to– increasing staff diversity, revising curricula, running professional development and family and community engagement.[13] That said, because diversity directors are often hired after a problem is identified, they often 'spend the bulk of their time creating the roadmap for the role.'[14] In writing about the efficacy of these practices, while some researchers have noted that the existence of a diversity director has little impact on student test scores, others have explained that those arguments are poorly researched and inaccurately capture the role of the diversity director in elementary and secondary schools, questioning whether test scores are the only worthwhile measure.[15]

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[9] Greene, J. P., and Paul, J. D. 'Equity Elementary: "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" Staff in Public Schools'in Heritage Foundation Backgrounder (2021), 3666.

[10] Rice-Boothe, M., and Marshall, T. R., 'Defining, measuring, and supporting the success of equity officers', Phi Delta Kappan, 104/3(2022), pp. 18–21.

[11] https://www.instagram.com/blackmainlinespeaks.

[12] Sasko, C., 'Calling out racism at Main Line schools', Philadelphia Magazine, accessed 14 July 2020, https://www.phillymag.com/news/2020/07/14/black-main-line-speaks/.

[13] Williams, D. A., and Wade-Golden, K. C., The chief diversity officer: Strategy structure, and change management, New York: Routledge, 2013.

[14] Rice-Booth & Marshall, p. 20.

[15] Fierros, E.G., 'NEPC review: Equity elementary: "Diversity, equity, and inclusion" staff in public schools', Boulder, Co.: National Education Policy Center, 2022.

Though the terms diversity, equity and inclusion can be defined independently, they are commonly put together with the acronym DEI to represent a systematic program that an organisation engages in for the purpose of meeting the needs of all constituents. More specifically, these programs are designed to both increase representation and ensure fair treatment of individuals who may have been historically marginalised. In the DEI section of the website of Friends Academy, a Quaker school in New York, they outline the following definitions for each of these terms.[16] They explain that (to them) DEI focuses on: who is in the room (*diversity*), how we can open the door for everyone (*equity*) and how we can make sure everyone is heard (*inclusion*). These definitions have much in common with the definitions found on the websites of many independent schools – both Quaker and non-Quaker. Many definitions draw attention to the idea that diversity of persons should be considered across many different categories including: race, ethnicity, ability status, religious affiliation, gender representation, national origin and sex. Next, the term equity is used intentionally in these statements rather than equality. Equity is selected to account for historical and current structural inequalities. From this perspective equity can be understood as equal access to opportunity, while equality assumes that everyone naturally has the same opportunities.[17] Inclusion, lastly, implies that all members of an organisation experience a sense of value and belonging.[18] These systematic programs in DEI are currently found across schools, colleges and universities and many business entities.

Quaker schools are not absent from the elementary and secondary movement to hire diversity directors. Friends School Baltimore,[19] for example, has an eight-person Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team.[20] Though not all Quaker schools have a diversity director or similar position on staff, of the schools listed on the Friends Council for Education website, one half of the 60 Friends Schools in the United States explicitly listed such a person on their website. This number is more significant, given the fact that many of those 60 schools have faculties with fewer than ten teachers and administrators in total and only educate students through 5th grade (or are only preschools). In schools with such small faculties there is often only one administrator – and it would be challenging economically to create a stand-alone position. This research only focussed on those administrators for whom this was their sole job duty as outlined on the website, but a fuller picture would come from including those faculty

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[16] https://www.friendsacademy.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion.

[17] https://diversity.uiowa.edu/resources/dei-definitions.

[18] https://diversity.umich.edu/about/defining-dei/.

[19] The schools mentioned in this literature review were not included in the dataset for confidentiality purposes at the request of the Institutional Review Board.

[20] https://www.friendsbalt.org/about/diversity-equity-and-social-justice.

members at smaller schools who play this role in addition to being classroom teachers. The vast majority of larger schools *do* have at least one individual specifically labelled as an administrator focussed on DEI. Moreover, schools are making clear connections between their DEI work and their Quaker mission. The Friends School of Baltimore, for example, explains 'Our values-based Quaker education is a 300-year-old tradition that helps us create and sustain an inclusive community that promotes diversity and equity in all forms'.[21] Similarly, the Abington Friends School in the suburbs of Philadelphia states that 'Developing a critical consciousness and creating a conscious community is a result of Quaker pedagogy and practice, where every voice is valued, and wisdom comes from the group. Learning is achieved through inquiry, reflection, collaboration, service, and respect.'[22] While DEI in Quaker schools may, on the surface, cover some of the same topic areas as non-Quaker schools such as hiring, professional development, curricular review and student support, the initiatives at Quaker schools are sometimes supported by and connected to Quaker teachings, so they have the potential to become part of the fabric of the school if they are not already.

Because of the Quaker commitment to social justice, it would make sense for these schools to be at the forefront of the movement to embed social justice teaching into the elementary and secondary curriculum and to ground those efforts in Quaker theologies – and research demonstrates that some Quaker schools were engaged in social justice efforts long before the summer of 2020. In a 1991 study on Multicultural Education in a Quaker School, O'Grady explained 'The Quaker concern for others is the springboard from which anti-racism work for this school springs. The belief that there is that of God in every person, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, or class, is a hallmark of Quaker belief.'[23] Even earlier, Howard Brinton, in his 1949 Pendle Hill pamphlet on Quaker Education, explained that historically 'tendencies toward community, harmony, equality, and simplicity have in varying degrees have persisted throughout...[and] resulted in definite educational policies' among which he includes both 'equal education of both sexes' and 'equality in education of races and classes.'[24] In arguing what the future should hold, he wrote:

> the school must again become a training ground for a specialist community which
> lives according to a way different from that of the world around itself...inequities

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[21] https://www.friendsbalt.org/about/diversity-equity-and-social-justice.

[22] https://www.abingtonfriends.net/about-us/diversity-inclusion/.

[23] O'Grady, C., 'That of God in Every Person: Multicultural Education in a Quaker School', in C. A. Grant (ed), Toward Education that Is Multicultural. Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Multicultural Education (February 15–17), Needham, Mass.: Silver Burdette Ginn (1997), p. 79.

[24] Brinton, H., 'Quaker education in theory and practice' Pendle Hill Pamphlet 9, p. 41.

now existing must be eliminated. In the matter of race this may require serious sacrifice...race and class prejudice and discrimination seem to be increasing in the world at present...a more active obedience to Divine admonitions may again make the Quakers pioneers in social developments.[25]

While Quaker schools have long seen social justice as part of their mission, there is still much that is unknown. What is not known from existing research is the extent to which school leadership explicitly articulated a clear connection to those Quaker values and ideals expressed by Brinton. Also unknown are the ways the individuals who serve as drivers of this work articulate the theological connection between Quaker teachings and the school's DEI efforts.

Conclusion

From preliminary research of school websites, it is quite clear that many elementary and secondary independent Quaker schools claim to intentionally ground their commitment to social justice in Quaker teachings. What has been less clear is whether there is a uniquely Quaker approach to DEI work in schools and whether DEI administrators are able to clearly articulate the theological underpinnings of those teachings. This research updates and builds on the work of Carolyn Ruth O'Grady[26] that was conducted over thirty years ago. While O'Grady's research focussed only on one school and documented the process of becoming an anti-racist school, this research provides snapshots of schools in various stages of this journey to both understand the ways in which DEI administrators articulate theological connections and to provide suggestions for innovation.

Methods of the Research Study

Research Questions

The key question for the research component of this study was, 'how do DEI administrators at independent Quaker schools articulate the role of Quaker philosophy, theology and practice in intentional diversity, equity and inclusion efforts?' This research question is framed intentionally around understanding how these administrators explain what is behind their DEI efforts, particularly considering the resistance that many Quakers feel towards the concept of theology. If the hesitance towards the concept of theology is identified, then how do the administrators preface the Quaker approach to DEI? What

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[25] Brinton, Quaker Education in Theory and Practice, p. 97.
[26] O'Grady, That of God in Every Person, pp. 73–83.

are the reported benefits and drawbacks of embracing a theology? It is important to note that this research was initially conducted as part of the author's promotion package, a process which necessitated that the author apply a theological lens to her field of study. This lens was the motivation to understand how today's Quaker editors think and speak about theology.

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

To address the research question, a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design was adopted.[27] Under this research design, quantitative data is collected to paint a broad picture of a phenomenon followed by the collection of rich, qualitative data to explain and contextualise those quantitative data. As a result, data collection for this project took place in two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of an initial exploratory probe using a brief survey focussed on teasing out the way DEI administrators explained the role(s) of philosophy, theology and practice in their work at their own school. The survey phase was conducted over the summer and early fall of 2023. With the hope of higher response rates, the survey was relatively short at seven questions. The survey used Likert scales to ask individuals to rate their familiarity with Quaker 'philosophy,' 'theology' and 'practice' (without defining the terms) and to rate how influential the Quaker faith was in DEI efforts at the school was. The survey contained open-ended question to allow participants the opportunity to expand on their responses. The survey was designed by the author and pilot tested by colleagues prior to distribution. This phase of research was designed to align the population with the existing literature and plan for the second phase of research.

The second phase of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with DEI administrators who expressed interest in participating in interviews in their questionnaire. Qualitative interviews lasted about thirty minutes and were held over zoom. The audio for the interviews were recorded and the interviews were transcribed for analysis. The interview protocol, which was driven by the results of Phase 1, included a request for the interviewee to describe their role, discuss how they learned about the Quaker faith and to discuss specific efforts at the school regarding DEI. Throughout the interview, the author asked follow-up questions of participants to reflect on the extent to which these specific efforts were tied to Quaker theology. The questions were open-ended and Quaker specific language such as the inner-light or 'that of God' were not used by the author unless first used by a participant.

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[27] Creswell, J. W., and Clark, V. P., Mixed methods research, Los Angeles, Ca.:SAGE Publications, 2011.

Sample

Using both the Friend's Council on Education website and the Wikipedia list of Friends Schools,[28] a total of 60 active Quaker Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States were identified. From that list, Diversity, Equity and Belonging Directors were contacted from 29 schools. The remaining 31 schools either did not have anyone with a title similar to diversity director listed on the school website (30 schools) or there was no contact information provided for that individual (one school). Many Quaker schools in the United States are quite small in size, so it is likely those schools with already small faculties may not have the resources to employ such an administrator. Future iterations of this study may involve soliciting similar information from administrators or individual teachers. In other words, the fact that only half of the identified schools had an easily identifiable director of diversity should not imply that only half of the schools are committed to social justice, most of the larger schools (those that included a high school, for example) did have an easily identifiable member of the administration.

Of the 29 schools that were contacted via email, only nine individuals responded to the survey, a response rate of 31 per cent. While this percentage is in-line with the typical expectation for a survey response rate, the small number of respondents still had an impact on the results. It is possible that individuals who had more negative opinions may have abstained from taking the survey, thus missing potentially important data. Participants were contacted via email at four different points in time: two in the summer, one in the beginning of the school year and once at the end of September. The emails explained that they were being asked to complete a short research survey focussed on DEI at Quaker schools and were provided the option of anonymity if they did not wish to engage in an interview or confidentiality if they did. It is difficult to know exactly how many emails went junk folders, how many emails were ignored and how many individuals chose not to respond for other reasons, but it is likely that all three of these scenarios impacted the response rate. For example, a lack of response could indicate an avoidance of discussing theology, especially when the term was not explicitly defined, or anxiety that the survey was not actually confidential. Interestingly, of the nine individuals who responded to the survey, a total of six expressed willingness to participate in the interview stage. All six were contacted to schedule follow-up interviews, and four consented to participate in interviews despite repeated efforts. Due to the small number of participants engaged in the study in totality, the results cannot be used to generalise to the population of Quaker schools or DEI administrators in Quaker schools. That is not to say that the study does not have meaning, it can be

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28 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Friends_schools.

used as a springboard to ask questions for future research, and it can help clarify what questions might be useful to ask in the future.

Analytical Method

Due to the small sample size, quantitative data were only analysed using descriptive statistics and the open-ended question was analysed with the hope of shaping questions for the qualitative interview protocol. Notably, also due to the small number of Quaker schools in the United States, demographic data on the participants was not recorded to protect participant confidentiality at the request of the institutional review board. Qualitative interviews were coded using the thematic coding where data are sorted into various categories and organised to help answer the key research question.[29]

Results of the Research Study

The key findings are summarised below and organised into Phase 1 (results of the initial probe) and Phase 2 (results of the qualitative interviews). While Phase 1 is organised by questions asked on the survey, Phase 2 is organised around various themes.

Initial Exploratory Probe

The responses to survey questions are summarised in **Figures 1, 2** and **3**. As can be seen from **Figure 1**, all participants reported that they were at least somewhat familiar with Quaker philosophy and practices with the majority falling into the extremely familiar category. The responses regarding Quaker theology, however, were quite different. Most respondents rated themselves as moderately familiar with Quaker theology, however the second largest group only rated themselves as slightly familiar with Quaker theology. The key takeaway from this question is that participants overall likely feel more confident about their understanding of Quaker philosophy and practices and less confident in their understanding of Quaker theology. **Figure 2** shows that that all respondents see the Quaker Faith as at least slightly influential, and the majority feel that the Quaker faith is either very or extremely influential in the DEI efforts at the *school level*, despite noting that this is slightly lower at the individual classroom level. Similar responses were shared in the open-ended question of the survey, where one participant wrote 'Leadership at our school helps guide the intentional focus of Quakerism from down. These practices are incorporated throughout our school and are the standards by which we instruct and facilitate conflicts, share celebrations, and bring our community together' and another wrote 'Quakerism is essential to the ethos of our school community. As such we are always looking back to equality and how it points toward equity'. It was clear from these

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[29] Braun, V., and Clarke, V., Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide, London: SAGE, 2021.

responses that Quakerism, broadly defined, had a great impact on the DEI efforts at their Quaker schools. Lastly, **Figure 3** shows that respondents noted that both Quaker practices and Quaker philosophy inform DEI efforts, but less than half of respondents felt that Quaker theology informs those same DEI efforts.
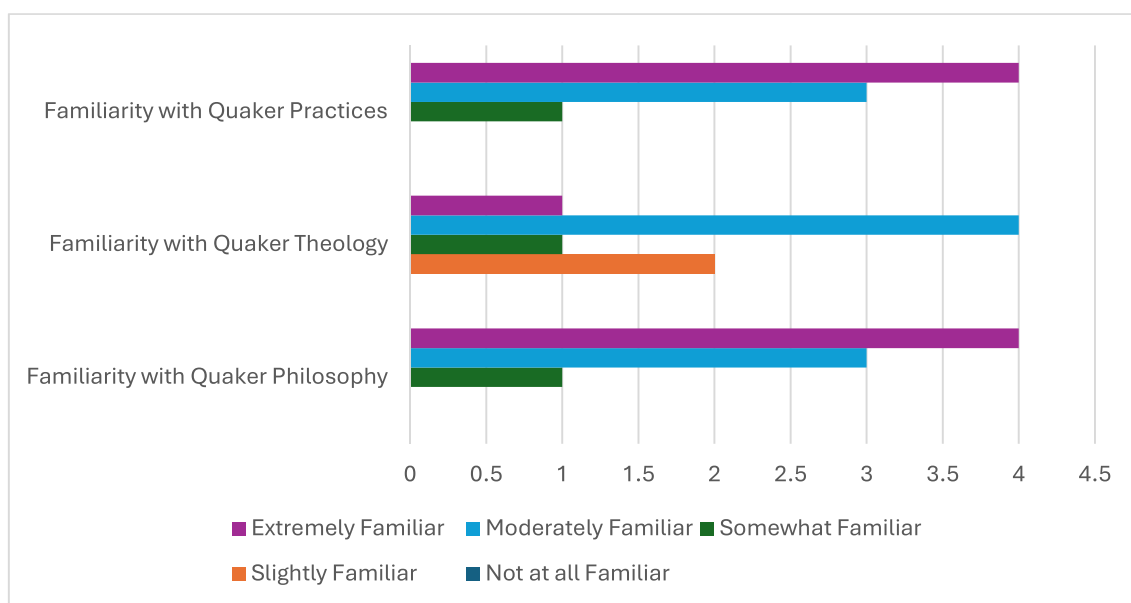

Figure 1: Familiarity With Different Elements of Quaker Faith.
Count of survey respondents self-reported degree of familiarity with different components of the Quaker faith.
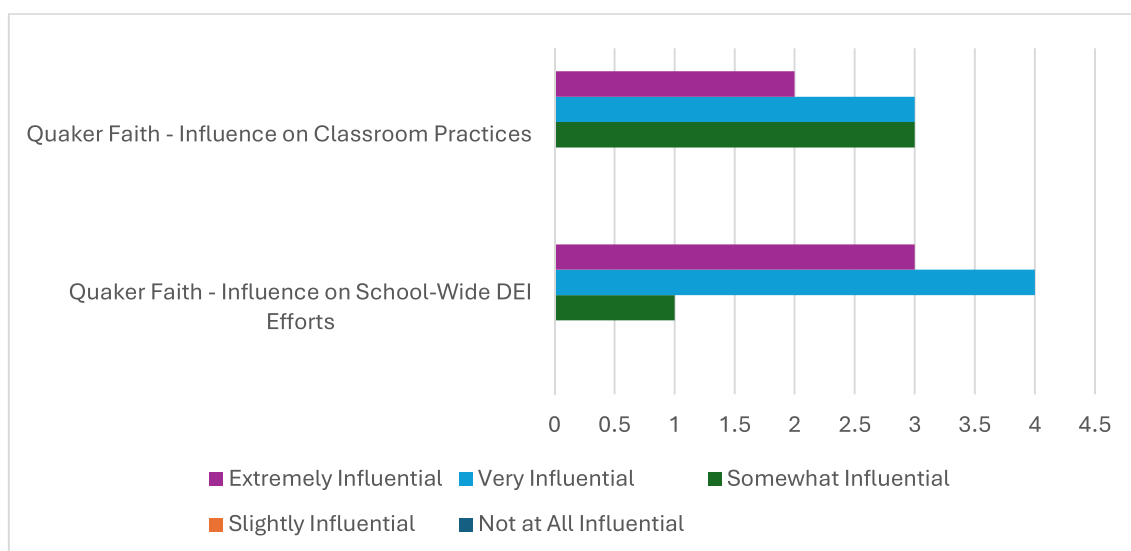
Figure 2: Perception of Influence of Quaker Faith on School Wide and Classroom-Based DEI Practices.
Count of survey respondents self-reported perception of the degree to which the Quaker faith influence school-wide vs. classroom-based practices related to Diversity Equity and Inclusion.
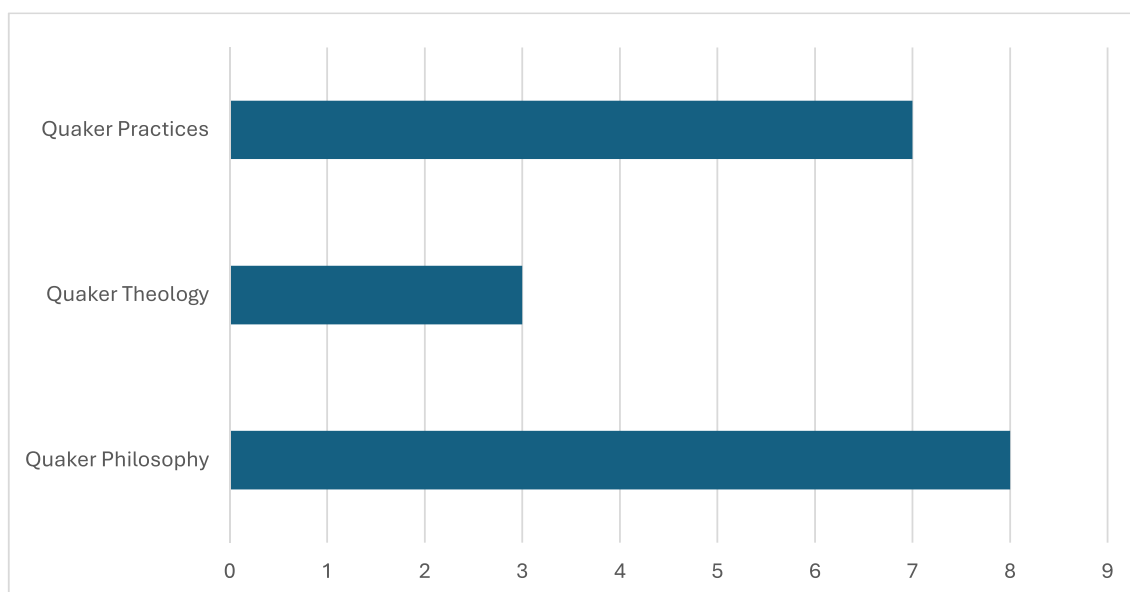
Figure 3: Which Elements of the Quaker Faith inform DEI Efforts in Your School?
Count of respondents self-reported perspectives on the which elements of the Quaker Faith inform DEI efforts in their individual Quaker Schools.

While the sample completing the survey was quite small, the general findings demonstrated that administrators at Quaker elementary and secondary schools do see the Quaker faith as a basis for DEI efforts at their Quaker schools. When asked to think more explicitly about how the specific elements of the Quaker faith (philosophy, theology and practices) contribute to those efforts, participants reported stronger connections to the concepts of philosophy and practice. Results from this survey highlighted the need for Phase 2 to identify examples to explain the explicit connection between Quaker faith and DEI efforts at their school *and* the need for participants to explain, in their own words, Quaker theology, philosophy and practice.

Data Collection Phase 2

The results of the second phase of data collection are summarised around key themes that were identified in interview transcripts.

'What are the DEI Efforts at Quaker Schools'

In addressing this question, it is important to note that each school had a different title for the name of the DEI Director and, accordingly, each DEI director also played a unique role in the school. This distinction was seen in both the way their role was enacted and the activities that the school prioritised. One individual supervised a team of DEI directors, another worked with a faculty DEI committee, and another worked primarily independently. In terms of their programmatic focus, while one participant

clearly noted that they were intentionally *not* focussed on programming related to specific holidays and cultural events, another described a large portion of their role in the school as leading school-wide efforts around a very specific holiday.

The general DEI efforts at the schools encompassed both system-wide projects as well as smaller, classroom-level projects. Several examples are listed below. This list is intentionally general, as providing additional details would make it possible to identify the schools and participants engaged in the research. Some of these efforts exist at the school-wide level while others are at the individual classroom level:

- Providing DEI instruction directly to students in the classroom and beyond.
- Working with teachers to revise school-wide curricula with a clear DEI focus or lens.
- Providing or identifying professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, staff and trustees about culturally responsive instruction
- Student support, particularly around affinity groups but also one-on-one student support
- Working directly with parents both as a part of a support system and an educational arm of the school, this includes running parent education workshops
- Participating in school-wide systemic change around how the school
  - admits students
  - structures overall hiring practices
  - organises fundraising
  - provides financial support to families
  - presents itself to the public

Anecdotally, the list above has much in common with the DEI efforts at other independent schools and are not inherently Quaker-based practices. Many schools create affinity groups for students, provide faculty professional development in DEI, celebrate Black History Month, rebrand their websites, and provide direct instruction to students in the form of guest speakers or workshops. What stands out are the efforts that went beyond the students and the teachers. The involvement of these DEI administrators in work with the parent community and the boards of directors spoke to the way in which DEI is woven into the fabric of the school – with an emphasis on the Quaker testimony of the community. What was more visceral in my conversations with these administrators, however, was the way in which these experiences were explained to me, the ways in which they were able to explain the Quaker values as the motivating force behind these efforts. In other words, it was not whether or not the school-based DEI elements were

at the classroom or community level that stood out, it was how the participants were able to connect the enactment of those efforts to Quaker principles that stood out.

'How are your school's DEI Efforts Uniquely Quaker'?

Participants were directly asked the question: 'what makes your DEI programming explicitly Quaker?' Their responses revealed that while each school had their own specific approach to DEI from a programmatic perspective, they had much more in common when explaining how those efforts were grounded in Quakerism. The common threads included a focus on the inner light, connection to the Quaker testimonies of community and stewardship and the unique challenges to engaging in DEI efforts at a Quaker school. All of these terms were supplied by the individual respondents and not the author.

Regarding the first thread, the concept of the inner light or the divine in every individual, one participant explained this by stating that DEI work is 'a natural consequence of the Quaker belief that light can come from any corner of the room'. The concept of light was mentioned in all four of the qualitative interviews, with one participant noting that language about the individual light had been included explicitly in a DEI-focussed curricular revision process at the school. Another participant put it this way: 'I think that the concept of "that of the divine in everybody" kind of drives me personally, but definitely is [also] something we talk about as an institution...intentionally trying to hold that when we make decisions – whether it is decisions about a student or a time off policy, trying to keep that at the forefront of our mind'. Another participant explained 'we try to use the Quaker values within the context of what we are teaching. We are constantly weaving in the idea that there is a light, "that of god" or however it is described in your belief system–because of that we have to remember the past and help our neighbour'. The primacy of the focus on the inner light, or the divine in all, is in line with the way that Quakers have often defined their faith both historically and currently.

The second common thread that united the participants was a focus on the Quaker testimonies of community and integrity. One participant laughingly stated that 'Quaker schools are big on committees,' but further explained that those committees are grounded in both community and integrity, explaining that they 'approach decisions with integrity and in the best interest of who [they] are trying to serve'. Another participant explained that one of their signature programs, community education, is driven by the testimony of community, 'we feel like it is important for us to be a vessel of education and make sure that all of the community is involved in this work and knowing that it's not just...if it's just faculty and staff but our board of directors is not really into...it's gonna impact, it's all intersectional...intentionally drawing in all parts of our community'. Also, on this thread participants mentioned the role that community service plays in their DEI efforts, expanding the definition of community

to beyond the school campus and family. Community service has often been a part of the independent school tradition, and is not unique to Quakers, but participants explained that the articulation of those service efforts as part of the DEI work of the school is uniquely Quaker.

The final, though likely most meaningful, theme across the interviews focussed on the ways in which the Quaker identity poses particular challenges to the work of DEI directors. In other words, there were specific hurdles to engaging in DEI work that participants felt were directly tied to Quaker practices and values. The first key challenge that one of the participants articulated was tied to the Quaker testimony on pacifism. She explained that this testimony led community members to focus more explicitly on 'keeping the peace' and made it challenging to engage in difficult conversations about race and racism in the community. Multiple participants pointed out that community members in the school sometimes struggled to acknowledge the racist past of Quaker meetings, which have historically been primarily white spaces. One participant explained 'Quakerism is a very white institution, there are many people who deeply believe in Quaker values but also feel that these values mean that we don't have to address race, or the lack of diversity within Quakers in general'. Quakers often see themselves as pioneers in the abolition movement, which they were, but they did facilitate segregated meeting houses. Community members at times, participants explained, struggled to acknowledge the nuances and imperfections of their role in anti-slavery and desegregation efforts.

One participant pushed the connection to the Quaker faith even further, stating that while Quaker beliefs are an excellent entry point to increasing DEI efforts in a school, DEI efforts can (and should) also have an impact on an individual's Quaker beliefs. They explained 'Seeing the light in everybody – that is wonderful and super important as a principle for everybody, but understanding the role of bias and stereotypes in everybody is helpful to see that light in new ways'. In other words, she saw her role not just in shaping DEI around the Quaker faith, she saw DEI efforts as a way to deepen the Quaker faith and ability to see the light in all. This is what makes DEI efforts uniquely Quaker—not only are the DEI efforts explained or justified by Quaker values and testimonies, the act of engaging in social justice work better allows you to understand and enact your Quaker identity.

'How are your DEI efforts aligned specifically with Quaker Theology'?

After being asked about how their DEI efforts were uniquely Quaker, participants were asked to more explicitly draw a connection to Quaker theology. In the coding phase, the only items that were coded as related to Quaker theology were those responses to direct questions about theology. The researcher never assumed a comment was classified as theological if the respondent did not classify it as such. Several of the participants struggled

with an immediate response to this question, with one responding that 'I don't know other than through the common thread of what most religions teach would be to love thy neighbour...the theology piece throws me for a loop'. Statements like this provided support for Brinton's explanation for Quaker's tendency to shy away from theology.

Participants were then shown the results of the quantitative survey and most responded that they were not surprised that this was ranked the lowest among the options. In reflecting on that data, one respondent explained that 'the way that [our school] respects Quakerism is as a kind of a very individual thing, so some quakers at [our school] are Christian, some are not, some administrators are Christian, and some are not. So, for me, Quaker theology is about the divine being both diffuse because it is in everybody but also concentrated within each individual person. And if you believe that, it generates this idea of equity and justice and the inference of belonging'. This statement falls in line with Gwyn's findings about the diversity of the Quaker faith and is connected to disconnect many Quakers feel when trying to reconcile how they understand the concept of theology and the Quaker insistence on being an accessible community.[30] This begs a broader question, could embracing the theological background of the Quaker faith help these DEI directors navigate that dissonance within the community, particularly relying on Christian theology around forgiveness for past sins?

Discussion

Quaker schools provide a unique context for the study of DEI efforts. The shared philosophy and practices – encompassed in the testimonies of integrity, equality, simplicity, community, stewardship, and peace – provide a common ground for understanding both the commitment and overall approach to social justice work. The study described in this paper sought to investigate how DEI administrators talk about DEI practices in Quaker schools. The alignment of DEI efforts with Quaker values is not only reflected in the presence of DEI administrators but also in the explicit connection that was made between these efforts and the Quaker faith mission of each school as articulated by interview participants. In discussing the theological basis of DEI work in Quaker schools, participants noted two key tensions that are worthy of further discussion and research. The first tension is present in the very concept of Quaker theology and the second in the disconnect Quakers face in confronting their own biases past and present.

Quaker theology, rooted in the belief in the inner light in every individual, further forms the foundation for the Quaker perspective on equality, integrity, community, and social justice. That said, historically, the absence of a rigid doctrinal framework has led to Quakers to distance themselves from the term theology. Quakers often believe that the

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[30] Gwyn, '"But who do you say that I am?"'.

absence of rigid doctrine has allowed for diverse theological orientations among Quakers and a faith that is accessible to all, which most Quakers see as beneficial. This tension was reinforced by multiple participants who began our conversations by explaining the importance of the belief that inner light reflects the divine within each individual as a driver of each school's commitment to equity and justice. This seemingly theological statement, however, was often followed by a great deal of uncertainty when asked explicitly about theology. One participant went so far as to state that my question about theology 'threw [them] for a loop' and another drew attention to the presence of both Christian Quakers and non-Christian Quakers in explaining the lack of theology behind their practices. This first tension is something that I am continuing to grapple with, and I have yet to find a compromise or solution that satisfies the 'what if's' associated with the ways in which non-Christians may perceive a more theological explanation of the social justice work in Quaker schools. I do think that, as Brinton suggests, if acting Quakers were able to articulate the goal of modelling themselves in the image of Christ and embrace the theology inherent in their own social justice work, it would only serve to strengthen their own drive for equity in society. As this applies to creating inclusive schools, the exact pathway to this model requires a good deal more thought.

The second tension expressed was the disconnect Quakers grapple with as they confront their own biases. Challenges can arise from Quaker values like pacifism, which can inhibit dialogue on sensitive topics – particularly topics focussed on the current and historical racial disparities perpetuated by Quakers and Quaker schools. The conflation of pacifism with non-confrontation has allowed Quaker individuals and schools to focus solely on the history of abolitionism and anti-racism while ignoring the whiteness of Quaker spaces and the history of segregated meetings. Both tensions get to the heart of Quaker identity. Quaker identities, like those of many religious groups, are tied up by a series of competing goals and philosophies. As Quaker schools grapple with these tensions, they have the opportunity to further their own commitment to Quaker teachings and many of the DEI directors expressed a desire to keep moving forward by challenging those histories.

This study provides valuable insights into the intersection of Quaker beliefs and DEI efforts in Quaker schools. The commitment to social justice is deeply rooted in Quaker theology, philosophy or values, and practices. As a result of this commitment, Quaker schools are actively engaging in DEI initiatives, and administrators perceive a strong connection between these efforts and their Quaker values. The findings suggest a need for continued exploration and dialogue within Quaker communities about the theological underpinnings of social justice efforts and the challenges that are unique to Quaker DEI efforts. I believe that there is a pathway forward for a theological approach to social justice work in Quaker schools.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.