

Values Education in Bahá'í Schools

Jennifer Chapa
Bahá'í World Centre
Haifa, Israel

and

Rhett Diessner
Lewis-Clark State College
Lewiston, ID, USA

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Summary of the Contribution

Abstract

A general introduction to a Bahá'í view of the purpose of education is given, along with a review of common principles and features of Bahá'í-inspired schools. The term "Bahá'í-inspired" is used to include both schools that are administered through Bahá'í institutions and those that have been created by individual Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í perspective emphasizes that moral and spiritual education are a greater priority than an intellectual education, yet both are considered essential; in fact, teaching for both is considered "light upon light". Various aspects of a Bahá'í curriculum, related to a values education that is multiculturally sensitive, are considered: a) content knowledge of the various world religions, b) the oneness of humanity, c) unity in diversity, d) peace and world citizenship, e) a life of service to humanity, and f) consultative dialogue. Examples of how Bahá'í-inspired schools achieve their aims are then sketched: a) the "School of the Nations" in Macau, b) the "System for Tutorial Learning" in Colombia, c) the "Maxwell International Bahá'í School" in Canada, d) the "Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women" in India, e) the "School of the Nations" in Brazil, and f) "Bahá'í Pre-Schools and Teacher Training Program" in Swaziland.

Biographical Note

The lead author, Jennifer Chapa, graduated from Earlham College in 1992 with a degree in Psychology and Spanish. Since then she has worked in various capacities at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, as a research associate and an editorial assistant for "The Bahá'í World" in the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information and currently as a research associate in moral education and human resource development. Second author, Rhett Diessner, earned a Master's degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Oregon, and a doctorate in Human Development from Harvard University. He currently works as Professor of Psychology and Education at Lewis-Clark State College, Lewiston, Idaho, USA.

Values Education in Bahá'í Schools

The state of human society today can be characterized as one of rapid and accelerating change in all its aspects - social, political, economic, cultural, and moral (Commission on Global Governance, 1995). Chaos and confusion plague humanity; civil wars and unrest, increased incidents of domestic and international terrorism, growing materialism, acts of moral depravity, and economic hardship are seen worldwide. People everywhere have become disenchanted by ineffective, traditional systems of government and social organization, while new solutions are yet to be discovered. The social needs of a world that has shrunk to a village, owing to the incredible advancements of science and technology during the past century and a half, require forging new relationships and organizational structures and developing a conscious understanding of the transformation which society is undergoing (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1995; Commission on Global Governance, 1995). Confronted by such a distressing situation, more and more people are searching for ways to resolve it. Signs of hope and a vision of a "new world order" are becoming increasingly evident as world leaders gather more often to deal with global issues and as the grassroots arise together to address local problems (Mathews, 1997); the need to cooperate is apparent (Havel, 1995).

One sign of humanity's desire to overcome the current state of affairs is a worldwide trend towards emphasizing values or moral education in schools to prepare children to assume their future societal roles (Etzioni, 1993; Sandel, 1996). Bahá'ís are among those who recognize that an academic education devoid of an explicit values education, sensitive to a multicultural world, will not create the kind of citizen that contributes to the progress of human civilization (Baha'i International Community, 1995). In fact, Bahá'ís believe that the foundation of a proper education is the acquisition and implementation of sound values and virtues.

The Bahá'í view of education is based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son and chosen interpreter of his teachings. Bahá'u'lláh (1976) advised his followers to, "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements" (p. 213). Hence, the aim of Bahá'í education is the process of learning how to apply Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual and moral teachings to the problems of the world in order to effect a positive transformation in the individual and collective lives of humanity.

Bahá'u'lláh (in Shoghi Effendi, 1991) taught that religion is "the greatest of all means for the

establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein" (p. 186). The purpose of religion in this world is to "effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1950, p. 240). Examining the history of humankind, we find that religion has been the impetus for the rise of many great civilizations. Consider the transformation in the Arab people which resulted from their acceptance of the teachings of Muhammad. Warring tribes were united under one faith and developed the most advanced civilization at the time.

Notwithstanding, the perversion of religion, the abuse of religious authority and religious fanaticism are responsible for many of the problems of the world today. Faced with the current state of religion, people have turned elsewhere for solutions to society's ills: "...they have turned either to the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions or to the following of man-made ideologies designed to rescue society from the evident evils under which it groans" (Universal House of Justice, 1985, p. 6). How many of these ideologies have resolved or mitigated the vast problems facing our world today? By ignoring spirituality and pursuing contentment through material means, disillusionment has only increased.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, human beings have a dual nature - spiritual and material. As the creation of God, humans are essentially spiritual beings. Their purpose in the material world is to draw ever closer to God through the acquisition of spiritual qualities and virtues which, when applied through service to others, contribute to the progress of society. By neglecting the development of spiritual capacities and needs, and focusing solely on achieving material pleasure, humans become worse than animals. The animal lives according to its instincts; it does not have the capacity to be consciously aware of and understand its environment and the consequences of its actions. Humans, however, do have this capacity; when they do not use it and allow their base desires and passions to rule their behavior, they remain more savage than the animal. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) wrote,

"how wretched and contemptible, if he [man] shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages... this is man's uttermost wretchedness: that he should live inert, apathetic, dull, involved only with his own base appetites. When he is thus, he has his being in the deepest ignorance and savagery, sinking lower than the brute beasts". (p. 4)

On the other hand, a human being educated in spiritual and moral virtues who uses her

knowledge in service to others and society is indeed noble. From a Bahá'í perspective, the purpose of education is to cultivate children's spiritual capacities so that they will contribute nobly to the betterment of the world. Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom" (1976, p. 260). Because education is so important for the progress of civilization, Bahá'u'lláh made it obligatory. The education of all, whether male or female, is absolutely necessary if humankind hopes to destroy the "foundations of war and contention" and establish peace in the world ('Abdu'l-Bahá in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #82).

Bahá'í education begins in the home. Although fathers play an important role in raising children, the mother, as the primary caretaker of a newly-born infant, is the first educator of the child and is responsible for the child's initial development.

"For children, at the beginning of life, are fresh and tender as a young twig, and can be trained in any fashion you desire. If you rear the child to be straight, he will grow straight, in perfect symmetry. It is clear that...it is she [the mother] who establisheth the character and conduct of the child" ('Abdu'l-Bahá in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #96).

When a child is old enough, he or she begins school. The aim of a school should be to cultivate not only a child's intellect, but to help it develop good character and behavior. The child's education should be "of three kinds: material, human, and spiritual". The first refers to "the progress and development of the body", its nutritional and other needs. The second concerns the various aspects of human endeavour and civilization such as "government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries, and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal". The third involves the cultivation of spiritual qualities, virtues and attitudes which form the basis of human social relations ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1981). Bahá'í-inspired schools strive to educate children in all three areas.

Common Principles and Features of Bahá'í-Inspired Schools

Bahá'í-inspired schools aim to translate the Bahá'í teachings into practice. There is no universal "model" of Bahá'í education; rather, Bahá'í-inspired schools may be seen as

laboratories for learning how to apply Bahá'í principles to the conditions of the populations which they serve to educate. Although Bahá'í-inspired schools are found on every continent and serve many types of people from many different backgrounds, they are based on the same principles and share common features and aims. The latest available statistics note that, on a worldwide basis, there are 178 academic and 488 tutorial Bahá'í-inspired schools (Bahá'í World Centre, 1996, p. 319).

Moral and Spiritual Education

Moral training is the most essential feature of a Bahá'í school. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #74) explained that "the basic, the foundation-principle of a school is first and foremost moral training, character building, and the rectification of conduct." In fact,

"Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved -- even though he be ignorant -- is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978, p. 135-6)

Some of the qualities emphasized in Bahá'í schools are truthfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, humility, love and kindness, courtesy, cleanliness, determination, excellence, obedience, patience and tolerance. 'Abdu'l-Bahá counselled:

"The more cleanly the pupils are, the better; they should be immaculate... The children must be carefully trained to be most courteous and well-behaved. They must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm of purpose in all things" (1978, p. 135).

"First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; The rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws, to accord

total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all" (in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #80).

Through the loving encouragement and nurturing of the school teacher, a child acquires the desire to strive for excellence in all realms of learning - whether spiritual or academic.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976) advised:

"Strive thou with heart and soul; see to it that the children are raised up to embody the highest perfections of humankind, to such a degree that every one of them will be trained in the use of the mind, in acquiring knowledge, in humility and lowliness, in dignity, in ardour and love." (#62)

Every human being is endowed with the capacity to manifest spiritual qualities and moral virtues. Education is the process that draws out these potentialities. Sometimes,

"certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger and of temper....greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy. But if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy". ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1981, 215)

Thus, how one utilizes the qualities one possesses is of key importance. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) explains that one of the characteristics of the spiritually learned is the ability to oppose one's passions:

"This is the very foundation of every laudable human quality," he writes, "How often has it happened that an individual who was graced with every attribute of humanity and wore the jewel of true understanding, nevertheless followed after his passions until his excellent qualities passed beyond moderation and he was forced into excess". (p. 59)

Children must learn how to use their spiritual qualities to overcome their physical desires. They do not have an innate ability to do this; they must be educated. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) explains further:

"There are some who imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and ensure his spiritual and material perfection. That is, an

individual who is characterized with natural intelligence, high resolve, and a driving zeal, will, without any consideration for the severe punishments consequent on evil acts, or for the great rewards of righteousness, instinctively refrain from inflicting harm on his fellow men and will hunger and thirst to do good...We also observe in infants the signs of aggression and lawlessness, and that if a child is deprived of a teacher's instructions his undesirable qualities increase from one moment to the next. It is therefore clear that the emergence of this natural sense of human dignity and honour is the result of education." (p. 97-8)

Children must develop good character through discipline and order. They must be trained systematically -- rewarded and punished as necessary. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) wrote, "That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world" (p. 27). The teacher must be very careful to properly encourage and counsel children in a loving and caring manner so that they will become obedient. At times, however, children may need to be carefully punished, though never through verbal or physical abuse.

To summarize: the most important aspect of Bahá'í education is acquisition of moral and spiritual qualities. All children possess the potential to develop these virtues, but a loving education is necessary to actualize them. Should a child manifest spiritual and moral attributes through good conduct and a praiseworthy character, that child will benefit others. Children learn good behavior in an orderly and disciplined environment and through constant encouragement from their teachers.

Religious Education

As mentioned previously, religion has been the primary cause of the rise of civilizations throughout history. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) writes, "...the religions of God are the true source of the spiritual and material perfections of man, and the fountainhead for all mankind of enlightenment and beneficial knowledge" (p. 94). Moreover,

"Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of

mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization." (p. 98)

Bahá'ís believe that God has sent a progressive series of Divine Educators or Prophets throughout the ages to guide humankind. The religions founded by these Prophets, such as Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Bahá'í, came from the same God. In light of this belief, Bahá'ís are encouraged to educate their children not only in the teachings, principles and history of the Bahá'í Faith but of past religions as well. From their earliest days, children should be exposed to the Word of God and learn religious concepts, for:

"God sent His Prophets into the world to teach and enlighten man, to explain to him the mystery of the Power of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to reflect the light, and so in his turn, to be the source of guidance to others. The Heavenly Books, the Bible, the Qur'an, and the other Holy Writings have been given by God as guides to the paths of Divine virtue, love, justice and peace" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1995, p. 57).

For Bahá'ís, religious training is an aspect of moral and spiritual education. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) taught:

"Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God, may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry." (p. 68)

Children who gain insight into religious teachings and establish a relationship with God, are more likely to be able to develop their spiritual natures and oppose their material inclinations. Thus, the regular recital of prayers and readings from Sacred Scriptures are an essential feature of Bahá'í-inspired schools.

Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills

"Following religious training, and the binding of the child's heart to the love of God, proceed with his education in the other branches of knowledge", advised 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #70). As ignorance is the primary cause of the problems of the world, education in the various fields of knowledge is of crucial importance.

"The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the

decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 109).

When the peoples of a nation are educated, the nation progresses. "Observe carefully how education and the arts of civilization bring honor, prosperity, independence and freedom to a government and its people" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 111). Hence, taught Bahá'u'lláh (1988a), education should be compulsory:

"Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone... knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Happy the man that cleaveth unto it, and woe betide the heedless". (pp. 26-7)

As the "purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people", all people must be educated in the "branches of knowledge as are of benefit" to humankind (Bahá'u'lláh in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #26, #17). Therefore, in school, children must learn to read and to write. They must study foreign languages so that they can communicate with people of other countries. They must be educated in music and other arts and study the sciences. They must be trained in crafts and other practical skills (Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976). Consequently, they must pursue a profession in order to earn their livelihood as adults. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) taught that, "... man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy" (p. 35). He wrote that the "best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God" while the "basest of men are they that yield no fruit on earth" (1975, #82, #81). Hence, children must discover their calling through their school experience so that they may be able to acquire the material means to support themselves and their families and to contribute to the well-being of the community. The teacher's role, then, is to help the child to be trained in a "field for which he hath an inclination, a desire and a talent" ('Abdu'l-Bahá in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #79).

As knowledge is such a powerful tool, it must be exercised wisely and moderately. The spiritual and moral virtues one develops, assist one to use knowledge for good and useful purposes. "Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and a virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger," writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in Research

Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976, #74). We need only to look at the lessons of history to realize the truth of this statement. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1976) explains further:

"If...an individual hath spiritual characteristics, and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed toward God, and he also study other branches of knowledge -- then we have light upon light: his outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble." (#79)

Thus, the aim of Bahá'í-inspired schools is to integrate spiritual and moral concepts into every aspect of the academic curriculum, and create an environment conducive to the practice of spiritual, moral and religious values as well as the achievement of excellence in intellectual pursuits.

Oneness of Humanity

According to the Bahá'í teachings, all human relationships must be based on the principle of the oneness of humanity if peace and unity are to be established in the world. Human society is seen as one organic whole made up of individual, yet interconnected parts. Like a human body, society "functions through the unified, specialized functions of all its constituent parts. Every human being is a part of this organic entity, and his health or illness, his exaltation or debasement, his joy or sorrow, ultimately affects the whole organism" (Danesh, 1986, p. 32).

Science has proved that the human race is one species, although physical characteristics may differ. Bahá'ís believe that God created all humans "from the same dust" so that "no one should exalt himself over the other" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1975, #68). A sense of superiority by one people prevents others from prospering. Although the heart is one of the most important organs of the human body, it cannot function properly if the other organs of the body are not healthy. All the parts must work in unison for the maintenance and health of the entire body.

Bahá'u'lláh (1976) taught that rather than exalt oneself over others, one should "hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments" (pp. 94-5), and in personal relationships, "consort with all men...in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship" (p. 289).

Unity in Diversity

The principle of the oneness of humanity as a foundation for world unity does not preclude an appreciation of diversity. Although all humans are created essentially the same, as spiritual and material beings, they do differ in physical appearance and cultural experience. Bahá'u'lláh likened the diversity of the human race to a flower garden:

"He has declared that difference of race and color is like the variegated beauty of flowers in a garden. If you enter a garden, you will see yellow, white, blue, red flowers in profusion and beauty -- each radiant within itself and although different from the others, lending its own charm to them...If all the flowers in a garden were of the same color, the effect would be monotonous and wearying to the eye". ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, pp. 68-9)

Therefore, the differences which exist between human beings should not be the cause of disunity and contention, rather they should be celebrated as contributions to the beauty of the whole of humanity. "The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1995, p.45).

Peace and World Citizenship

"Religious, racial, political, economic and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity. As long as these prejudices prevail, the world of humanity will not have rest" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978, p. 299). These prejudices and the resulting divisions between races and cultures are manmade and not based on religious truth nor sound scientific knowledge ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1995). Bahá'u'lláh

"has said, and has guarded His statement by rational proofs from the Holy Books, that the world of humanity is one race, the surface of the earth one place of residence and that these imaginary racial barriers and political boundaries are without right or foundation." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 232)

Humanity is crying out for peace, which, as Bahá'ís believe, is an inevitable stage in the evolution of human civilization (Universal House of Justice, 1985). Gone are the days when one nation could live in isolation. The world is manifestly interdependent and a world civilization is beginning. Recognition of the interdependence of peoples and nations, founded on the principle of the oneness of humanity, requires one to view the world as a single entity. Bahá'u'lláh (1976) wrote, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" (p. 250). The children of such an

interconnected, global society must be trained as citizens of the world. Each must feel a "profound sense of responsibility for the fate of the planet and for the well-being of the entire human family" (Bahá'í International Community, 1993, p.1). Although this requires that one's primary loyalty be towards the whole of humanity and not solely to one's own people or nation, it "does not, however, imply abandonment of legitimate loyalties, the suppression of cultural diversity, the abolition of national autonomy, nor the imposition of uniformity" (ibid., p. 2).

Service

One of the most crucial requirements of world citizenship is the development of a sense of service towards others and towards the common good. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) asks,

"... is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures?" (p. 103)

He (1978) furthermore counselled,

"Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race." (p. 3)

Bahá'ís believe human beings were created to serve. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) wrote that "man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches" (p. 138). Serving others not only brings happiness to those who receive, but those who give as well. "Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and... vie with his fellows in service to the good of all" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 116). And, "Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976, p. 250).

Consultation

One of the most important skills for cooperative decision-making is the ability to consult in a group. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) advised, "Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding" (p. 168). Through discussion and sharing of ideas and opinions, participants strive for consensus in decision-making. Because of the diversity of views of a number of

individuals, the solutions resulting from consultation are sure to be more creative than those devised by one person alone.

Consultation is based on several key principles. First, information on the problem or topic to be discussed ought to be gathered from many diverse sources. Second, in order to gain the most from the opinions of the participants, each must strive to be as open and honest as possible while remaining courteous and avoiding statements that might be viewed as prejudicial. Third, once an idea has been shared it becomes the property of the entire group, thereby requiring individuals to avoid defending their ideas. Finally, the group must try to reach unanimity of thought and action, although a majority vote decision is acceptable if consensus is not reached (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1994).

Bahá'u'lláh (in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1980) explained that "no welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation" (#2), because it "bestows greater awareness and transmutes conjecture into certitude" (#3).

Some Examples of Bahá'í-Inspired Schools

Schools founded on Bahá'í principles may be officially sponsored by Bahá'í administrative institutions or may be private ventures owned and run by Bahá'í-inspired agencies or individual Bahá'ís. There are Bahá'í-inspired schools and educational projects in many countries and in every continental area. Some of the schools are fairly traditional in their organization, while others provide alternative educational opportunities for disadvantaged populations. The schools and programs highlighted below represent a diversity of approaches to the implementation of Bahá'í teachings and principles.

School of the Nations - Macau

Founded in 1988, the School of the Nations is a private, non-profit international school licensed by the Government of Macau. It offers pre-school through secondary education to nearly 500 students. Although most of the students are from Macau, Hong Kong and China, the students and teachers together represent more than 30 cultures and five continents. Classes are taught in English to allow students greater access to information, and in Mandarin to prepare them for Macau's return to China in 1999. In the secondary school, students prepare for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE).

One of the key features of the School is its moral education program which aims to develop students' moral capabilities. The term capability refers to "a developed capacity to carry out actions purposefully in a well-defined field of endeavor" (Nogouchi, Hanson and Lample, 1992, p. 14). A moral capability is concerned with the field of morality and, therefore, "results from the interaction of certain related qualities, skills, attitudes and knowledge that enable a person to make moral choices" (ibid., p. 14) which affect his or her personal life as well as social relations. The kindergarten and secondary school programs are the most developed.

At the kindergarten level, the building blocks of moral capabilities -- spiritual qualities, skills and abilities, attitudes and knowledge -- are integrated into all subjects across the curriculum. For example, in science, students learn the concept of the oneness of humanity through studying the family as a system. Once the children understand the nature of the family and how its members cooperate, the concept is expanded by looking at how families within a community are related and interact, and so forth. In math, the concept of the oneness of humanity is conveyed through lessons on the mathematical concept of a set. The children look at larger and larger sets of children -- in their class, in the country and then in the world. Separate moral education classes, in which children learn about virtues such as courtesy, sharing, service, love, cooperation and generosity through prayers, stories, games, role plays and other activities, are also given.

The secondary school moral education program emphasizes five specific capabilities: to create a healthy family, to empower others, to bring joy to others, to preserve the environment and use its resources soundly, and to consult effectively. Each week students spend two hours either serving various organizations and projects or in class consulting about and evaluating their experiences. Students keep journals about their activities.

In the first year of the program (Form 1), students learn about the education of children and practice their knowledge by assisting in the school's kindergarten or by tutoring primary school students. Once confidence in their ability to serve is gained, the students begin to work with agencies outside of the school. In the second year, students learn about environmental conservation, manage the school's recycling program and educate other students, teachers and parents about the need to recycle. They also work with the Park Service to clean designated public areas. In the third year, students learn to document the history of Macau, particularly, its social service organizations, in order to produce materials, such as videos, for the education of the public. During the fourth year, students work with the elderly in nursing homes under the direction of social workers. In the fifth year, the students choose the type of social service

organization that they would like to serve.

The moral education program not only helps the students to develop a sense of service to others and the community but also to learn about themselves and realize their responsibility to contribute to the betterment of society. The School also takes care to educate parents about the program and to enlist their support. The program has been so successful that the social service agencies have come to depend on the volunteer assistance of the School's students.

System for Tutorial Learning - Colombia

The System for Tutorial Learning (SAT) is a secondary-level rural education program developed by the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences (FUNDAEC), a non-profit development agency based in Cali. In the early 1970s the founders of FUNDAEC, most of whom were Bahá'ís, became aware of the lack of opportunities for secondary education in the Cauca region, due to a paralysis of poverty and urban migration. Realizing that traditional schooling methods would not solve the region's problems, they began to develop the SAT program according to the needs and realities of rural life with an emphasis on the sciences.

Today the SAT curriculum is recognized by the government and is offered to 15,000 students in 13 of Colombia's 30 departments. It is also being used in an increasing number of Latin American countries. Although FUNDAEC trains tutors and administers the program, tutors may start classes in any community through seeking the sponsorship of the municipal government, a non-governmental organization, or a religious group. Tutors form small groups of students who study together for 15 to 20 hours per week. The tutor guides the students through a series of workbooks. By participatory learning methods, students acquire practical skills needed for rural life and gain a deeper understanding of their connection to and responsibility towards the environment.

The curriculum is not divided into subject areas, but rather integrates them to be more meaningful to the students. For example, in the series of workbooks called Descriptions, students learn words and concepts that help them describe the world around them. When learning about systems and processes, the students look at the example of the human body, thereby learning anatomy and physiology. Moral and spiritual concepts and principles gleaned from the Bahá'í teachings are incorporated into the curriculum. Service to the community and virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, and love are emphasized.

Maxwell International Bahá'í School - Canada

The Maxwell International Bahá'í School, established in 1988 in Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia, is a residential secondary school beginning with grade seven. It is officially sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada. It offers a standard academic curriculum approved by the provincial government which is integrated with Bahá'í moral and spiritual concepts and principles. In addition, the school provides visual and performing arts and physical education programs. Approximately 240 students from more than 12 countries attend the school.

The Maxwell School is concerned with the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical development of its students. The school's goal is to prepare its students as world citizens and, therefore, the entire school environment as well as the curriculum revolve around this aim. Students are encouraged to study a diversity of subjects and to learn about the contributions the world's peoples, cultures and religions have made toward human civilization. Courses in history, geography and other social sciences examine the connections between peoples and their cultures and investigate the needs of human society in the present age. The mathematics program, which includes computer-programming, teaches students how to measure relationships, processes and changes in nature, society and in one's own life. The science program assists students to understand their relationship and responsibility towards nature and the establishment of sustainable environments. The health and physical education program helps students to care for and develop the strength of their bodies, and offers a variety of sports and other recreational activities. To learn to communicate more effectively, students study English and French, paying particular attention to effective speaking and listening as well as writing. Study of music and art allows students to express themselves artistically, while study of the world's religions leads to greater understanding of the spiritual and moral foundations of social life. A service program offers students the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice through serving their fellow students and the community at large.

Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women - India

Established in 1983, the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women works towards the improvement of the social and economic condition of twenty tribal communities in seven districts surrounding the city of Indore. The people living in this region are among the most marginalized in Indian society and few opportunities for education exist there. In 1981, the

census showed that only 7% of the rural population was literate and only 3% of the rural women.

The Institute has established courses and other programs which focus on changing traditional attitudes and practices based on prejudices of caste, tribe, religion and gender that have prevented men and women from working together for community improvement. Every year the Institute trains 50 to 60 women as community workers during a three-month residential program.

The majority of these women are between the ages of 15 and 20 and illiterate. The three-month course emphasizes literacy and numeracy in Hindi, health and nutrition education, spiritual education based on the Bahá'í teachings and focusing on the principle of the oneness of humanity, and the development of skills such as sewing, embroidery, growing vegetables, and cycling. The program involves participatory learning activities and consultation to help women gain self-confidence. When graduates of the program return to their villages, they are capable of starting small income-generation or community improvement projects, teaching children's or literacy classes, and educating others in health matters. The Institute also trains annually, during a one-month course, 10 areas coordinators who visit the community workers to help them utilize their newly-acquired skills, establish and encourage local women's committees to organize activities for education and income-generation, identify and recruit students for future courses, and collect data for evaluation. By June 1996, the Institute had trained more than 700 women.

In 1992, the Institute was recognized with the Global 500 Roll of Honor award by the United Nations Environment Program for its role in the complete eradication of Guinea worm from the region as a result of education.

School of the Nations - Brazil

Founded in 1980 by a group of Bahá'í educators, the School of the Nations is a private bi-lingual, international primary school offering kindergarten through eighth grade. The curriculum is taught in both Portuguese and English and meets all government standards. Approximately 230 students representing more than 25 countries attend the school. Located in the capital city, Brasilia, the School attracts children of many foreign diplomats interested in the School's emphasis on world citizenship.

Through exposure to many cultures and religions, students learn to respect diversity but also to see the connections between the world's peoples. In grades five through eight, students go through a comparative religion program looking at the historical context of the Bible in the first year, followed by study of the New Testament, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith in each of the

remaining years.

The School of the Nations also offers a strong science program focusing on the environment. In 1993, the School of the Nations collaborated with the Office of the Environment of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil and UNICEF in developing an environmental education program for primary school children. The School's students in grades two through six wrote four skits about the elements of earth, fire, water, and air which they performed as part of the overall program for thousands of children. The School is also in the process of developing a science and ethics curriculum for grades one through four based on Bahá'í teachings.

Bahá'í Pre-Schools and Teacher Training Program - Swaziland

In 1986, a national pre-school curriculum plan based on the experiences of several Bahá'í pre-schools in Swaziland was approved by the Ministry of Education in order to establish standards for a growing number of pre-schools run by various organizations throughout the country. The curriculum incorporates moral and spiritual education in basic virtues such as love, respect for parents and teachers, unity, courtesy, and service, as well as other activities to prepare children for primary school. To ensure that teachers for the Bahá'í schools are adequately trained, a teacher-training program was developed which is also offered to students selected by the Ministry of Education.

Implications of Bahá'í Education in the Context of a Culturally Diverse World

As noted above, under the major header "Common Principles and Features of Bahá'í-inspired Schools", Bahá'í educational curricula not only explicitly emphasize tolerance of diversity, but go beyond that to advocate "unity in diversity". No Bahá'í-inspired school is without instruction in: 1) respect for cultures other than one's own; 2) recognizing the divine foundation of the major world religions, thus decreasing religious prejudice; 3) recognizing the essential oneness of humanity, thus decreasing ethnic and racial prejudice; and 4) emphasizing world citizenship and not nationalism, yet respecting a sane patriotism to one's native country.

Besides "direct instruction" in these values, Bahá'í education seeks to practice these beliefs. Bahá'í-inspired schools welcome and invite members of all races, religions and nations to attend them; while continuing to respect the individual student's, and the student's family's, belief

system. As shown in the "Examples of Bahá'í-Inspired Schools", above, students in these schools participate in service practica in which they provide some form of social service to the community surrounding them. They perform this service without regard to the religious, racial or class background of those they serve.

Although Bahá'í-inspired schools tend to be non-government affiliated, they generally meet government standards for education, and often assist the secular government in its goals to educate the people of that country. Bahá'ís believe in, and explicitly teach, loyalty to the secular government of the lands in which they reside, therefore governments tend to encourage Bahá'í-inspired educational innovations (see, in particular, the example in Colombia, above). Additionally, individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions encourage and support government schools efforts to increase the focus upon, and quality of, the moral education in government-run schools. Bahá'ís, though exceedingly cautious not to be involved in partisan politics of any kind, encourage their school boards, and governmental schooling agencies, to place prominently in their curricula: education for world citizenship, understanding of the teachings of the various world religions, oneness of the races, equality of the sexes, respect of nature and the environment, and the learning of skills that will allow students to become productive members of a world society.

In Summary

In this chapter we aimed to introduce the reader to a Bahá'í view of the purpose of education, along with a review of common principles and features of Bahá'í-inspired schools. The Bahá'í perspective emphasizes that values education (especially in the context of moral and spiritual values) is of greater importance than intellectual education, and high quality schools must give careful attention to both. Various goals of a Bahá'í curriculum, related to a values education that is multiculturally sensitive, were then examined. Those goals are: a) teaching content knowledge of the various world religions, b) studying and experiencing the oneness of humanity, c) appreciating unity in diversity, d) striving for peace and world citizenship, e) developing a life of service to humanity, and f) gaining the skills to conduct consultative dialogue. To illustrate the educational process of attaining those goals, descriptions of particular exemplar Bahá'í-inspired schools were sketched: a) the "School of the Nations" in Macau, b) the "System for Tutorial Learning" in Colombia, c) the "Maxwell International Bahá'í School" in Canada, d) the

"Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women" in India, e) the "School of the Nations" in Brazil, and f) "Bahá'í Pre-Schools and Teacher Training Program" in Swaziland. It was emphasized that students of all cultural and religious backgrounds are welcome in Bahá'í schools, and that these school's service practica are aimed at serving others of a variety of ethnicities and religious beliefs.

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