

Reviews/Critiques/Reseñas

LECTURES ON BAHÁ'Í-INSPIRED CURRICULA

Author: Farzam Arbab

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From the time I wrote my 1975 master's thesis entitled, "Implications for Education from the Bahá'í Writings," I have been trying to understand further and to elucidate the Bahá'í principles and ideals related to education. It is in this context that I read the published lectures of Farzam Arbab on Bahá'í-inspired curricula. To be able to share in the thinking of a person with as rich an educational and Bahá'í background as Dr. Arbab is a wonderful opportunity to those of us not fortunate enough to be able to hear the lectures from which this volume is drawn. The book is "offered for those who are interested in the development of educational material" (1), both for Bahá'í classes and for what is referred to as Bahá'í-inspired curricula. Bahá'í-inspired curricula reflect Bahá'í principles and ideals but do not proselytize. The aim of the book is to help us "gain insights into the process of curriculum development in order to become more effective in our educational efforts" (1).

The book is divided into six lectures. The first five lectures (fifty-one pages of the seventy-six page book) discuss understanding, attitudes, qualities, skills, abilities, and capabilities using a liberal number of quotations from the Bahá'í writings. The remaining pages give examples of educational materials, which the reader can analyze using what has been learned in the first part of the book. However, I found the examples to be of little help in furthering my understanding of the topics and believe fewer examples and more discussion of the principles involved would have been more useful to readers.

The curriculum development that the author envisions is an organic process involving consultation, action, and reflection. The basic goal of education is to develop the gift of understanding—what Bahá'u'lláh refers to as the first and foremost of the favors bestowed upon us by God. The author's ideas related to the fostering of understanding are presented in lectures two and three. The second lecture explores the objects of understanding—what we are supposed to understand. Lecture three discusses the conditions for understanding with a focus on the spiritual dimensions.

Lecture four addresses the development and change of attitudes, the enhancement of spiritual qualities, and the acquisition of skills and abilities. Lecture five describes the concepts of capability and integration. I found the author's description of his personal experiences in developing capabilities and integration in the rural university where he worked especially useful.

As a devoted reader of Bahá'í education-related material, I welcomed the morsels of insight offered in these brief pages, but like most books in this category, it left me wanting, unsatisfied. Throughout the lectures, the author asks the participants to reflect on or analyze various Bahá'í passages. One would have liked to hear the classes and the author's reflections and analyses.

This book makes an important contribution to the ever-growing literature on Bahá'í education, but one continues to look for more breadth and depth of understanding on this vital topic. It is valuable to be able to share in the thinking of respected Bahá'ís as an assistance to clarify and reflect upon one's own understandings, perhaps enabling us to lead more effective lives and carry out more effective programs.

One of the benefits of a book like this is to encourage others who have studied, reflected upon, and worked at applying Bahá'í principles and ideals to education to write about their own experiences, thoughts, and reflections so that still others may benefit and draw upon their understandings. This organic consultative process appears vital to the ongoing development of our understanding of what education according to a Bahá'í perspective is, and which, as Shoghi Effendi says, "... should guide future Bahá'í educationalists in their efforts to formulate an adequate teaching curriculum which would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age."¹

The book was as valuable to me for its contents and ideas as for an indication of where the current thinking about Bahá'í education is with leaders in that field. I applaud publishers like Palabra who make such materials available at a reasonable cost.

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1. Quoted in *Bahá'í Education: A Compilation* (Thornhill, ON: Bahá'í Community of Canada, c1977): ix-x.