

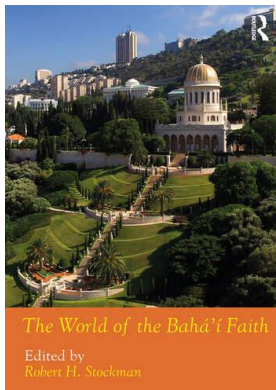
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The World of the Bahá'í Faith

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EDUCATION IN PEDAGOGY
AND PRACTICE*Filip Boicu and Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam*

Education is, from a Bahá'í perspective, a most fundamental instrument for building, sustaining, and propelling the advancement of civilization. In the civilization envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh, a universal and comprehensive education will contribute to maintaining unity and cohesion, releasing human potential, and enabling every individual to participate in the generation and application of knowledge necessary for spiritual and social progress. There is as yet no Bahá'í curriculum, no system of Bahá'í education. Such a system will only emerge in the future as a result of increasing numbers of educationalists from all over the world endeavouring over successive generations to understand and apply insights derived from the Bahá'í revelation and diverse fields of study and practice.

Bahá'u'lláh says that 'the source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His glory' (*Tablets* 156). The infinite divine Essence being ultimately beyond all knowledge, this refers in particular to God's Primal Will, which is the agent of the creation of the physical universe and the source of divine revelation. As such, the Primal Will is the Object and the ultimate end of all learning. This can be viewed as the first principle of a Bahá'í-inspired comprehensive educational philosophy and pedagogy.

A consequence of this principle is the unity of all knowledge at the epistemological level, because all existence and revelation fundamentally express the same one Agency. This implies the unity of the cosmic and moral order. A consequence of the unity of all knowledge is the Bahá'í principle of the harmony of science and religion, another key theme in Bahá'í education. Faith and reason are understood to be essential aspects of the same knowing process.

The second major principle of a Bahá'í-inspired comprehensive educational philosophy and pedagogy, the oneness of humankind, has two major aspects to it. First, it recognizes that all human beings have profound spiritual and rational capabilities and the purpose of education is the actualization of their potentiality. This potentiality is shared equally by all races and ethnic groups, and by both men and women, hence all deserve equal access to education.

Second, Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that 'the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens' (*Gleanings* CXVII). His teachings lay the foundation for a global society. Thus, curriculum building must 1) produce knowledge that prioritizes the global as the main unit of analysis and as the focus of ethics and decision-making; 2) provide a pragmatic fusion of spirituality and virtue

ethics with issues of global social justice; 3) support an architecture for global governance; and 4) build a world identity and culture that erase the asymmetries existing between the different segments of humankind.

The importance of the oneness of humanity is encapsulated by two passages from the Bahá'í Writings. When asked about the purpose of life for a Bahá'í, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in Jordan 1977: 23) said it was 'to acquire virtues', which refers to the first aspect. Shoghi Effendi stated that it was 'to promote the oneness of mankind' (Rúhíyyih *Khánun*, in Jordan 1977: 23–24).

Curriculum building within the Bahá'í community is very much a process in its early stages. No comprehensive study of the totality of the Bahá'í Writings on the theme of education has yet been undertaken. An overall definition of Bahá'í education at this point would only be, therefore, a matter of conjecture. As was noted in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1939,

the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not present a definite and detailed educational system, but simply offer certain basic principles and set forth a number of teaching ideals that 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.

(Research Department 1998: v)

The Primal Will

The Primal Will, or the first emanation of God, is the force simultaneously directing both the process of progressive revelation and the evolution of the universe. Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh are as sanctified mirrors reflecting its light unto the plane of history (see the chapter on progressive revelation). We can think of these Manifestations of God as collectively representing the Primal Will of God and the distinction among them as a reflection of their different times and contexts.

'It is this Primal Will', explains the Báb (*Selections* 162), 'which appeareth resplendent in every Prophet and speaketh forth in every revealed Book'. Nature, however, is also the Will of God or the Primal Will:

Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 142)

The Primal Will 'appears in infinite forms in the realities of all things, and is specified and individuated according to their capacity, receptivity and essence' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 341). It constitutes the inner reality of all things, which is why we cannot grasp our own true reality or that of any other thing.

The Primal Will or the Will of God is the First Cause of Aristotle and also the sea of the (created) Names and Attributes of God (similar to the Forms of Plato or the 'eternal archetypes' of Ibn 'Arabí) while all created things are its waves and images. It is a pre-existent Universal Reality 'which encompasseth all, directing and regulating all the parts of this infinite creation' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 49) in such a manner that all beings in the universe and the entire process of evolution are subject to one law or divine system. Finally, ethereal matter as an intellectual reality

and substratum of all existence resembling the notion of a quantum field is also the expression of the Primal Will:

the substance and primary matter of contingent beings is the ethereal power, which is invisible and only known through its effects, such as electricity, heat, and light—these are vibrations of that power . . . it is the sign of the Primal Will in the phenomenal world. . . . The ethereal substance is, therefore, the cause since light, heat, and electricity appear from it. It is also the effect, for as vibrations take place in it, they become visible. For instance, light is a vibration occurring in that ethereal substance.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Brown 1990: 15)

If nature (and all created things), the First Cause of existence, the process of evolution, and what directs and regulates all parts of the universe are the same Will of God that is the source of Divine Revelation, and which appears in each Manifestation of God and their scriptures (to the extent they have been preserved reliably), then it can be said that to a large extent the objects of knowledge and also the domains of investigation for both science and religion are one. This also explains why the Primal Will is described in the Bahá’í Writings as the Source, the Object, and the ultimate end of all learning. The dualism of Matter/Spirit or Nature/Spirit that is such a crucial part of Western thought appears, therefore, no longer to be a central principle; rather, the Bahá’í conception seems to centre on a form of nondualism that presupposes the unity of existence as a real existence revealed and hidden in all things, including in ourselves. That this existence can be seen as one means that, at the most fundamental level, knowledge, truth, and Being are one. This would imply that there is a cosmic and moral order in the universe, that the universe is essentially good, beautiful, and full of purpose, and that our individual and collective lives essentially imply a pattern of order that can be actualized through the use of reason.

The harmony of science and religion

The consensus in the Bahá’í community is that the Bahá’í Writings advocate a relationship of complementarity between science and religion. Current viewpoints fall on a continuum between the last three options of Barbour’s (2000) fourfold taxonomy: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. Although historians of religion (Brooke 1991; Cantor and Kenny 2001) have shown that Barbour’s taxonomy cannot capture the complexity of the historical interaction between science and religion, no form of curriculum building could exist without utilizing similar categories. While the harmony of science and religion is a fundamental Bahá’í principle, the complementarity it presupposes cannot be one in which science and religion are concerned with separate domains of existence—material/physical reality vs. moral/spiritual reality, or Nature vs. the supernatural/Divinity. They cannot be seen as two unrelated languages serving different purposes, for example, the investigation of different objects of knowledge; or as functioning with different methodologies, such as reason vs. faith, or reason vs. the irrational/the mystical. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (quoted in Taylor 2013: 32) tells us that ‘religion and science are intertwined with each other and cannot be separated’. He states that religion must accept scientific facts and proof and that both religion and science are ‘founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason and both must bear its test’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Taylor 2013: 31). Shoghi Effendi (*Bahá’í News* 1934: 85.1) regards ‘[t]he Revelation proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh’, to be ‘divine in origin . . . scientific in method’. If we take a fine-grained look, each scientific discipline has its own particular scientific method which differs from others, and the same applies to different religions.

Hatcher (1980: 7) has proposed a general definition of the scientific method that would apply to all domains of science and to religion: science occurs when we make our assumptions about reality explicit and begin to examine the logical relations between them and their consequences (theorizing) by testing our assumptions (experimentation) until an organized body of knowledge (a collection of statements) that can provide a coherent model of reality develops (which will be continually revised). The beauty of this formulation lies in how it allows for faith to be a normal part of the knowing process, side by side with reason, for faith can be subsequently defined as 'the total emotional and psychological orientation resulting from the body of assumptions about reality' which an individual has consciously or unconsciously made (Hatcher 1980: 8).

The unity of knowledge

While most people are aware of accelerating disunity and social division, they tend not to associate the fragmentation of their individual selves and social structures with an epistemological crisis of which the most obvious symptom has been the fragmentation of knowledge. And yet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (quoted in Taylor 2013: 38) states that the force to end all wars, discords, and struggles and unify humankind can be released through the harmony of science and religion:

Put all your beliefs into harmony with science; there can be no opposition, for truth is one. When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles—and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God.

This statement, together with the argument of the unity of all things through the Primal Will of God (arguably nondualism) clearly establishes the necessity of the integration of knowledge in curriculum development. It is no surprise then that Shoghi Effendi (Taylor 2013: 65) defines the essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth (i.e. the methodology for studying the Bahá'í revelation) as the analysis of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith by correlation with modern philosophy and science. The question, then, is how this integration of knowledge is to be achieved.

As Sabet (2002: 107) observes, religions follow particular stages in their interaction with existing scholarship. They begin, characteristically, with a period of self-focus, in which the believers strive to understand what is contained in the nucleus of the new revelation ('the essential subject matters of education at this stage are the teachings of the religion'). This is followed by a phase that opens this nucleus of new knowledge to dialogue with the outside world and existing branches of knowledge. The third and final stage is one in which the new revelation is capable of reinterpreting the outside world and interacting with its branches of knowledge to the point of producing a new system of knowledge (Sabet 2002: 107). It could be said that the Bahá'í community is now initializing the transition from the first stage to the second stage; that is, opening lines of communication with the academic disciplines (and fields of practice) and with the other religions, a process from which advancement in the arena of public discourses must also proceed.

The oneness of humanity

'The principle of the Oneness of Mankind', Shoghi Effendi (*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 42) states, is 'the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve'. The first important part of this principle is the distinctive nature of the human species. As Bahá'u'lláh explains:

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that most great Light. . . . To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: ‘Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery’.

(Kitáb-i-Íqán 100–101)

The immense potentiality of humans to reflect all the attributes and qualities of God underscores the importance of education. Bahá’u’lláh notes that

Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. . . . The Great Being saith: 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.

(*Gleanings* CXXXII)

In the passage, Bahá’u’lláh refers to a two-fold moral purpose of human beings: personal spiritual development and service to humanity. The inseparability of the two is underlined by this passage in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings:

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.

(*Gleanings* CXXX)

We see in this passage a definition of the character that true education is seeking to produce. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates further on the nature of education when He describes three kinds; material, human, and spiritual:

Material education aims at the growth and development of the body, and consists in securing its sustenance and obtaining the means of its ease and comfort. This education is common to both man and animal.

Human education, however, consists in civilization and progress, that is, sound governance, social order, human welfare, commerce and industry, arts and sciences, momentous discoveries, and great undertakings, which are the central features distinguishing man from the animal.

As to divine education, it is the education of the Kingdom and consists in acquiring divine perfections. This is indeed true education; for by its virtue man becomes the focal centre of divine blessings and the embodiment of the verse ‘Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness’ [Gen. 1:26]. This is the ultimate goal of the world of humanity.

(*Some Answered Questions* ch. 3)

The second important aspect of the principle of the oneness of humankind concerns itself ‘with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family’ (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 43), that is, with the globalized nature of the world. It refers to the need for all decision-making to be framed in terms of its effects on the well-being of the entire human race:

The compass of his thinking is so vast that he recognizes in the gain of all mankind the basis of the prosperity of every individual member of his species. He considers the injury of any nation or state to be the same as injury to his own nation and state, indeed, the same as injury to his own family and to his own self.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet on the Struggle for Survival*, para. 2)

In expanded form, this principle refers to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a unified global civilization. In sociological terms, because we are one human race, ‘prejudice of every kind—race, class, colour, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others’ must be renounced (Universal House of Justice 1985). From this perspective, the Universal House of Justice (1985) has urged that, as a spiritual truth confirmed by all the human sciences, the oneness of humankind ‘be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies’.

Bahá’u’lláh identified nationality and citizenship as key criteria of global inequality (Saiedi 2016: 32). A world community based on the consciousness of world citizenship, a collective security system, a global system of redistribution, a single code of international law, a supreme tribunal, and ultimately, a federal type of government acting as a world-superstate, with an international executive and a world parliament (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 40–41), are a few features of this principle. This wider conception is what ultimately motivates the recommendation of the Universal House of Justice (1985) that ‘consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child’.

Iranian Bahá’ís’ engagement with education

Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi were not just thinking about the betterment of the entire world when they defined principles of Bahá’í education; they also considered the needs of the persecuted and impoverished Iranian Bahá’í community, and guided and encouraged their educational efforts. In consequence, the Iranian Bahá’ís opened a significant number of schools to provide academic education to the young, a process that led to the exposition of some fundamental aspects of the Bahá’í teachings on education. Their experience also illustrates

how a community under siege and facing massive challenges tackled the issue of education and achieved something remarkable, not only for the young within the community itself, but for the cause of education in wider society.

Iranian Bahá'ís' educational efforts began in earnest in the early twentieth century (Shahvar 2009). They opened scores of modern (i.e. Western-style) schools, twenty of which were accredited by the state. In addition, the community initiated a range of other educational activities, including character training classes for children, which provided a basic education in the Bahá'í teachings, and literacy classes for women organized by special committees under the auspices of annually elected governing councils (now called local Spiritual Assemblies). Individual Bahá'ís at their own initiative also organized such activities as study classes on various aspects of the Bahá'í Faith or literacy classes for women. Although Bahá'ís themselves benefitted the most from these educational efforts, non-Bahá'ís attended Bahá'í schools and literacy classes for women. All accredited and several non-accredited Bahá'í schools were forced to close by the state in 1934–35. The community, however, continued its other educational efforts. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, in response to the state's policy of depriving young Bahá'ís from higher education, the community established the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (which will be discussed in the next section).

It is necessary to consider the environment in which the Bahá'ís' educational enterprise unfolded. At the turn of the twentieth century, the literacy rate in Iran was below five percent and poverty was widespread. About eighty percent of the population lived in rural areas under appalling conditions. Health services were literally non-existent outside a few major urban centres. Owing to this and the extremely poor state of sanitation, the great majority of children died before reaching the age of six. There was no system of public schools serving the young. The public was also hostile or at best indifferent to modern education in general and to the education of girls in particular. Iranian Bahá'ís also faced a unique challenge. As followers of a religion not recognized by the Muslim clerical establishment, they were subjected to sporadic persecution, the worst case of which occurred in 1903, when, in the province and city of Yazd, over eighty Bahá'ís were brutally massacred.

In spite of the existing challenges, not the least of which was lack of human and material resources, Iranian Bahá'ís, guided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, arose to establish schools. Bahá'í ideas on education were radical for their time (Handal 2007). Four aspects of the guidance provided to Iranian Bahá'ís were particularly salient given the context of early twentieth-century Iran. The first was that education was to be universal and compulsory. Bahá'u'lláh considered education to be the key to releasing human potential and indispensable to individual and social progress: 'Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone' (Research Department 1998: no. 16). Education of the child, He further noted, was 'the greatest means' for 'the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls' (Research Department 2020: no. 178). Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi maintained that providing education to the young was a binding parental and societal obligation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote,

Every child must be instructed in sciences as much as is necessary. If the parents are able to provide the expenses of this education, it is well, otherwise the community must provide the means for the teaching of that child.

(Research Department 2020: no. 182)

In the Bahá'í community, if parents were unable or failed to ensure that their children received education, the responsibility for it devolved on Bahá'í Assemblies.

The second aspect was that education needed to be comprehensive and combine spiritual, moral, and academic education. Spiritual education was the foundation of all education and needed to start at a tender age by the mother at home, before the beginning of formal education in schools. Love and fear of God were main elements of this education (Research Department 1998: nos. 47, 52, 79, 97). Moral education was to be an integral part of school education. In one of His letters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá noted that 'schools for academic studies' must also be 'training centres in behaviour and conduct' and emphasized that unless knowledge was 'coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character', it was 'a deadly poison, a frightful danger' (Research Department 2020: no. 190). In another letter, He wrote:

Exert every effort to acquire the various branches of knowledge and true understanding. Strain every nerve to achieve both material and spiritual accomplishments.

Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art—the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn world-wide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.

(Research Department 2020: no. 188)

The Bahá'í view that spiritual and moral education and secular knowledge were necessary and complementary and could accentuate each other's impact was unique. Many Iranians and the religious establishment in particular viewed modern education to be detrimental to religious faith, while some among the tiny minority that was in favour of Western-style education saw religion as the main bulwark of superstition.

The third aspect of the guidance to Iranian Bahá'ís concerned the importance of the education of girls and women. 'Abdu'l-Bahá held that the education of girls was 'of far greater consequence' than that of boys because of the role that mothers played in the education of the next generation (Research Department 2020: no. 192). Elsewhere He explained that girls were to receive essentially the same education as boys, even in the sciences. At the time, few among the public saw any benefit in providing education to females; many even believed that education corrupted girls' morals.

The fourth aspect was the need to provide educational opportunities for the poor and orphans and in rural areas. In His *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh referred to the responsibility of the Houses of Justice (present-day Spiritual Assemblies) to ensure that 'the poor and needy' were provided with education and stated that he who educated his own child or another's, it was as though he had educated a child of Bahá'u'lláh Himself (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* para. 48; Research Department 1998: no. 7). Shoghi Effendi stated that Bahá'í Assemblies had an obligation to ensure that the children of the poor received education (Research Department 2020: no. 195). Moreover, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi noted the need to establish schools in every hamlet, village, town, and city where Bahá'ís resided (Research Department 1998: nos. 69, 76, 122; 2020: nos. 193, 243).

The requirements of equal educational opportunities for males and females, urban and rural populations, and the wealthy and poor alike are all implied in the principle of universal and compulsory education and are corollaries of the fundamental principle of the oneness of humankind. The emphasis on education being comprehensive was in line with the principle of the harmony of science and religion.

Bahá'í schools, especially those that were accredited and followed the program of the Ministry of Education, did not fully incorporate into their curriculum spiritual and moral education

considered essential in the Bahá'í teachings, but their Bahá'í staff attempted to inculcate in their students such moral values as tolerance, truthfulness, kindness, and cleanliness. Classes that provided the Bahá'í teachings were developed separately and held on Fridays (the Muslim day of rest) when the school was closed.

Bahá'í schools were not denominational. Followers of all religions could study at them, and in some cases non-Bahá'ís made up a significant portion of the student body. For example, in the 1932–33 academic year, non-Bahá'ís constituted half of the student body of the Tarbiyat-i-Banát school in Tehran. With 719 pupils in kindergarten through the eleventh grade, it was then the largest girls' school in the entire country. Bahá'í schools thus promoted religious tolerance and association with students of other faiths, which were important given the prevalence of entrenched religious prejudice in Iranian society.

Bahá'í schools made a valuable contribution to promoting modern education in Iran, particularly girls' education, at a time when the public school system was completely inadequate and the state prioritized the schooling of boys over that of girls. At the end of the 1932–33 school year, females constituted half of the total student body of all the accredited Bahá'í schools. In that year, four percent of all females in accredited schools across Iran were enrolled in Bahá'í schools. Iranian Bahá'ís probably comprised less than half a percent of the country's population then. In that same school year, females constituted only twenty-three percent of the total number of the students in all accredited primary and secondary schools in Iran. In addition to its accredited schools, the Bahá'í community also had many non-formal schools, most of which operated in rural areas. The large majority of these were the first schools to be opened in their localities. Bahá'í schools also sponsored and assisted poor students, including non-Bahá'í students. They also influenced the public's attitude to modern education, particularly girls' education.

A range of factors contributed to the relative success of the educational efforts of Iranian Bahá'ís. They acted on the guidance they received even when they neither fully understood the vision of the heads of their Faith nor expected great tangible benefits from their efforts. They persevered despite great difficulties and were confirmed in their commitment to their schools by the results of their efforts. Whether the initiative to open a school came from a sole individual, members of the community, or an Assembly, it won the support of others. Many members of the staff of the schools, inspired by the ideal of service and motivated by a deep sense of moral responsibility, made great personal sacrifices to keep their schools running and maintain a high academic standard to the best of their abilities. The experience of the community's schools made an indelible impact on Iranian Bahá'ís. Pursuing education became and has remained a fundamental concern of the community, a concern which is expressed in the struggles to create and preserve the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education in recent years.

Three different Bahá'í-inspired curricula

In the last few decades, the Bahá'í community worldwide has created three different examples of Bahá'í-inspired curricular integration that complement each other: 1) a community building/social action-based curriculum; 2) a knowledge-based curriculum; and 3) one centred on the needs of the learner/human nature.

The development of the first of these examples—a community building/social action-based curriculum—can be traced back to the early 1970s, a period during which a Colombia-based Bahá'í-inspired organization called FUNDAEC (Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias, or Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences) initialized two types of curricula. Both aimed to integrate theory with practice by expressing spirituality and science in forms of social action that built community and increased well-being. Their curricula

were centred on the notion of acts of service and the socialization of knowledge in a given local community. The emphasis on acts of service derived from the notion that the love of God and, in consequence, service to humankind, should be at the heart of the process of capacity building. ‘Spirituality’, Farzam Arbab explains (1985: 28), ‘was treated as a state, an inner condition that should manifest itself in action’.

The concept of the socialization of knowledge asserted that: 1) knowledge generation and production should not be the prerogative of elites but processes in which all members of society should participate, and 2) curricular elements such as a textbook and a teacher should be conceptualized as a decentralized support structure for a process in which knowledge emerges from the social interaction of participants (consultation and collective practice). Capabilities were envisioned as sets of knowledge, attitudes, habits, and spiritual qualities that would interact in triggering meaningful social action (Farid-Arbab 2016: 266) and provided the critical elements for curriculum integration (of thought and action, and of science and religion) (see Annex I).

The first FUNDAEC-inspired curriculum was developed in relation to particular rural communities and their needs and was described as minimalist in religious content. It was called the SAT curriculum (Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial) and it constitutes one of the largest initiatives of the Bahá’í Faith in the field of development. Since 2006, a version of it titled Preparation for Social Action (PSA) has been adapted for more urban settings and for introduction to thirty-two other countries. The second curriculum was intended to be minimalist in theory and was developed exclusively around selected excerpts of the Bahá’í Writings, acts of service, and the socialization of knowledge as an induction program that would allow anyone to develop the capabilities needed to participate in the construction of a vitalized Bahá’í community and a new civilization. This curriculum is known as the Ruhi curriculum and it constitutes today the main Bahá’í approach to community building. One important concept it emphasizes is study (of scripture and of social reality), consultation (to arrive at collective consensus), action (to bring about a change), and reflection (to consider lessons learned, for the next cycle of study, consultation, action, and reflection).

The approach behind these two curricula has also inspired three other efforts: a Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme (JYSEP) employed both within the Bahá’í community and in the field of development; programs at the Bahá’í-inspired Nur University in Bolivia (in particular, the outreach project and training program in Moral Leadership established in 1998); and a training institute aimed at university students and graduates—the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) founded in 1999—that seeks to contribute to public discourses and the field of development while also extending the FUNDAEC approach into a sort of university-level curriculum.

Independently of FUNDAEC, Behrooz Sabet developed the second example of a Bahá’í-inspired curriculum, which stressed a knowledge-based approach. Starting from the fragmentation of knowledge characterizing modern discipline-based curricula and from the notion that the crisis of our age requires a theory of cultural and social change prior to a theory of education, Sabet (2002: 108) developed an adaptive integrative curriculum that could explore the emergence of ‘a new paradigm of knowledge’ based on the union of ‘the spiritual and scientific traditions of humanity’. Sabet showed how an incipient unifying philosophy, which could guide curriculum development, could be derived from the Bahá’í teachings.

In addition to its explication of how a curriculum that explored the Bahá’í Faith in light of science and philosophy would look in several subject areas, Sabet’s model (2002: 158) introduced four sequential clusters of knowledge. The first was concerned with the refinement of values, the second with generating facts. Together, they constituted the theoretical foundations from which first technological and then practical societal applications could emerge in the last two

clusters. Sabet sequenced these clusters of knowledge in the following manner: '1) theological, philosophical and ethical, 2) physical and biological, 3) applied sciences, and 4) the totality of sciences that contribute to the emergence of a world civilization' (see Annex II). Based on this structure, a liberal arts integrative curriculum was created between 1997 and 2003 that allowed undergraduates to study most of the main academic disciplines in the first two years before choosing their specialization (Sabet 2002). Sabet later strengthened the conceptual framework of the model in a noteworthy article on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epistemology (2012).

Starting in 2006, Sabet redeveloped and incorporated the same model into the integrative Core Curriculum program currently in use at the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) in Iran. Here, an attempt was made to integrate the Bahá'í worldview with the study of arts and sciences. The two were brought together into one institution seeking to contextualize and apply the Bahá'í teachings in the general curriculum of scientific disciplines. This change was achieved through the design of a core curriculum comprised of 1) general courses (English, Persian Language, Basic Math, Basic Science) and 2) interdisciplinary core courses in the liberal-arts tradition inspired by Bahá'í ideas (the History and Philosophy of Science, the History of Ethics, the Appreciation of Arts and Beauty, General Course in Epistemology, General Course in World History, and a Great Books course drawing on critical texts from the domains of literature, history, religion, and civilization). Since its inception, the Core Curriculum program has undergone several changes and the title and content of the courses have been revised. The Core Curriculum filled the void in specialized courses (engineering, chemistry, math, biology, business, pharmacy, law, architecture, sociology, psychology, and the like) with meanings and values. It was considered as a preliminary and transitional step and an experiment for the gradual development of a Bahá'í-based curriculum for higher education. It was assumed that the Core Curriculum program was the safest and the most organically oriented stepping stone toward the creation of a general curriculum based on the harmony of science and religion. This way, it was thought, the scientific boundaries of disciplines would be preserved, and the domain of values and meanings would not be superimposed as an ideology on the curriculum.

The third example of Bahá'í-inspired curricula, a curriculum centred on the needs of the learner, is the Anisa Model developed by Daniel Jordan during the 1960s and 1970s. The Anisa Model's concept of human nature and the universe leads it to identify change as 'the fundamental characteristic of the universe' and the key organizing principle of its philosophy as 'the translation of potentiality into actuality' (Jordan 1982: minutes 12–16). Human nature is defined primarily as infinite in potentiality.

The model's innovation is to create an integrative curriculum around four environments of the learner: physical (mathematics, natural sciences, natural history, and technology); human (language and communication, social sciences, human relations, and ethics); unknown (art, aesthetics, philosophy, and religion); and self (knowledge of the self as the experience of the other three environments in one human being). Technological, moral, and spiritual higher-order competencies are identified and incorporated into these environments, each consisting of sets of psychomotor, perceptual, cognitive, affective, volitional, and creative competencies.

In justifying this approach, Streets and Jordan argued that '[we] feel most "real" when we are relatively unimpaired in the process of becoming what we potentially might be' (Jordan and Streets 1972: 15); moreover, we all have the quality (referred to as 'transcendence') to 'extend potentiality indefinitely' (Jordan and Streets 1972: 79) as part of interacting with an 'environment of unknowns and unknowables—the ultimate mysteries in the cosmos' (Streets and Jordan 1973: 33). Spiritual competence is defined as the capacity to form and sustain an orientation towards the unknown, which eventually culminates in an active set of ultimate concerns that, if contemplated, can lead to ideals guiding us to actively pursue our destiny (Jordan and Streets

1972: 195–198). In this manner, an integrative curriculum is derived from a theory of development centred on the infinite potentialities of the individual learner and their self-actualization.

A certain kind of parallelism among the three models can now be observed:

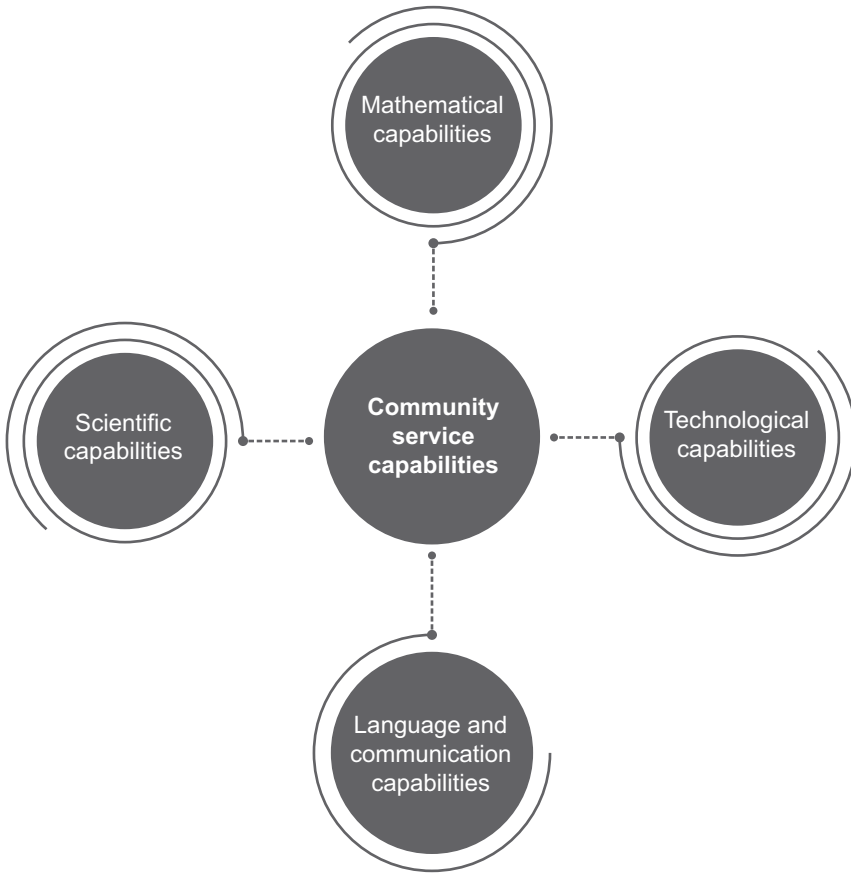
- 1 The Anisa Model focuses on human nature at the individual level (i.e. on the infinite potentialities of each student).
- 2 The FUNDAEC-inspired curricula focus on human nature at the collective level of the community, insofar as they aim at translating the potentiality of a community into actuality through a dynamic in which social transformation and individual moral transformation reinforce each other through acts of service.
- 3 The Sabet curriculum aims to investigate reality in its totality, but since nature is the expression of the same Will of God that is the source of Divine Revelation, this can be thought of as a comprehensive study of the Primal Will. However, as the Primal Will is constitutive of our human nature and of all known and unknown reality, this is equivalent also to a study of human nature—both individual and collective—and its infinite potentiality. By understanding human nature as the potentiality of human civilization translated into actuality, the Sabet curriculum focuses on humanity as a world civilization drawing on its manifold scientific, philosophical, cultural, moral, economic, political, and spiritual traditions and advancing towards forms of global governance, and on knowing oneself as part of a global community (i.e. as part of the oneness of humankind), and even beyond that, as part of the universe.

We can see not only that these three curricula are compatible but that they support the Anisa Model's identification of the cornerstone of a Bahá'í comprehensive educational philosophy with the principle of change or Becoming, applied to human nature; or, put more succinctly, as the translation of human (infinite) potentiality into actuality. It seems reasonable to assume that any Bahá'í-inspired theory of pedagogy will likely have this as its first principle, where infinite human potentiality is, in the sense of aspiration, the Primal Will itself. Viewed in this light, Rhett Diessner's contributions to pedagogy are indispensable. For Diessner (2007: 63) successfully links Robert Kegan's cognitive–developmental theory of the individual, which presupposes that 'to move to a higher stage of self one must leave behind a lower stage of self' with the Bahá'í view of spiritual development as the progressive attainment of selflessness through attraction towards a Divinity represented in all things as Beauty/Moral Beauty (i.e. virtues).

The Bahá'í teaching that each person represents a unique configuration of the names and attributes of God (virtues) in which one is dominant appears to legitimize the Anisa Model's emphasis on individualized instruction and personalized learning and to justify a curriculum set up to allow for each individual's unique identity, inner reality, or moral character to emerge (see Annex III). By affirming that such differences in human character translate into different but equally valid discursive perspectives on truth (even though a somewhat ineffable experience of a higher truth is also possible where two opposite perspectives can be maintained simultaneously via the use of antinomy and perspectivism), the same teaching seems to suggest that truth is relative, multiple, and perspective based, meaning the notion of objective and single truth can only be emphasized as ontological reality (Primal Will) but not as discursive truth expressed in words or formulated in statements (unless in limited form through paradoxes and antinomies). This suggests a definition of rationality that is epistemic, practical, intersubjective, always contingent on the historical and social context, flexible, and ultimately paradoxical—a matter with which the field of Bahá'í scholarship has only recently begun to engage (see Danesh 2019).

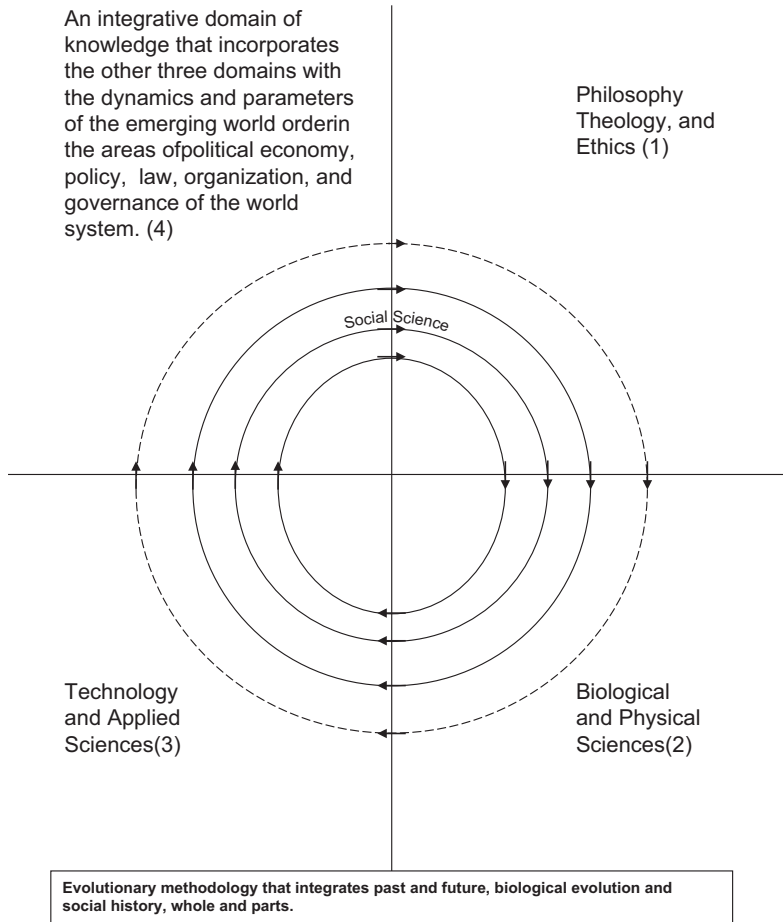
ANNEX I

From FUNDAEC's official website: <https://fundaec.org/en/sistema-de-aprendizaje-tutorial-sat/>



ANNEX II

From Sabet (2002: 156)

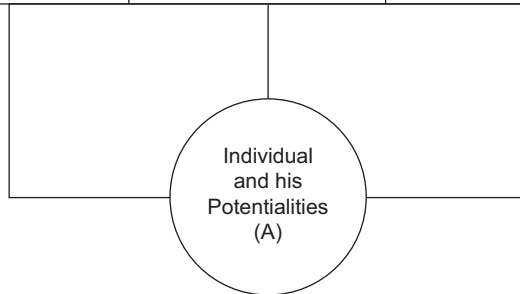


ANNEX III

From Jordan and Street (1972: 83)

ANISA MODEL CURRICULUM DESIGN

Divisions of (F) Curriculum	Math, Science & Technology	Communications & Human Relations	Art & Aesthetics
Higher Order (D) Competencies	Technological	Moral	Spiritual
Values (C)	Material	Social	Religious
Mediating (E) Symbol System	Mathematics	Language	Art
Environments (B)	Physical	Human	Unknown



POTENTIALITIES BECOME ACTUALIZED THROUGH INTERACTION WITH ENVIRONMENT

Conclusion

This chapter has touched on both the theoretical and the practical side of Bahá'í education as the understanding and practice have evolved. From two principal concepts—the unity of all knowledge and the oneness of humanity—numerous principles of pedagogy result. Education must focus on the development of character (virtues), the training of the mind, and on the acquisition of useful knowledge, especially the sciences, arts, and humanities. In the process, it must reflect the principle of the harmony of science and religion and inculcate a primary identity as a human being and a citizen of the entire world. It must both teach a rejection of prejudice against persons of other races, classes, and religions, and demonstrate its commitment to inclusion in the educational community it creates. It must prioritize the education of girls. It must be focused on the education of the individual in all her infinite potentiality and create a consultative environment of communal learning. Much of learning must focus on doing, especially service to others.

The Bahá'í community has been experimenting with educational models for a century and a quarter. The curricular innovations and the example of educational practice highlighted earlier mark early stages in a long process, during which, as the worldwide Bahá'í community's experience grows and the body of knowledge in the field of education expands, increasing numbers of scholars and educationalists from diverse backgrounds, drawing on insights from the Bahá'í Writings as well as the academic disciplines, will continue to refine and advance models of Bahá'í-inspired curricula and theories of education until such time as a comprehensive theory of Bahá'í education will have emerged.

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