

comme exemple
together with other like-minded individuals, d'une démarche pédagogique
d'inspiration

have to labor in diverse cultural and eco- bahá'íe dans laquelle de
modestes contri-
logical settings, identifying educational butions s'accumulent et
mènent finale-
needs, developing elements of a coherent ment à d'importants
progrès.
pedagogy, and creating a series of teach-
ing-learning experiences in which these Resumen
elements are given practical expression. Para poder avanzar
significativamente

The experience of the Junior Youth Spir- en la educación de
inspiration bahá'í,
itual Empowerment Program is offered necesitamos mantener en mente
la visión
as an example of an endeavor to advance extraordinaria de
Bahá'u'lláh del ser hu-
Bahá'í-inspired education in which modest mano que caminará sobre
esta tierra en
contributions accumulate and lead to sig- la plenitud del tiempo. Al ser
respetuosos
nificant progress. de los logros en el campo de la
educación,
necesitamos recordar que en su estado ac-
Resumé tual es incapaz de cultivar
semejante indi-
Si nous voulons véritablement progresser viduo. Humillados por la
realización de la
dans le domaine de l'éducation d'inspiration magnitud del trabajo por
venir, un número

1 This article is the edited transcript creciente de nosotros, junto con
otros in-
of a talk presented at the 40th annual individuos del mismo pensamiento,
debemos
conference of the Association for Bahá'í laborar en entornos
cultural y ecológica-
Studies held in Montreal, Quebec, in Au- mente diversos, identificando
necesidades
educativas, desarrollando elementos de
gust 2016.
una pedagogía coherente, y creando una
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serie de experiencias de enseñanza-apren- education will most probably
oc-

dizaje en las cuales se les da expresión cur as the result of the diverse ac- tivities of an increasing

práctica a estos elementos. La experiencia number of educators working in varied

del Programa para el Empoderamiento of educators working in varied

Espiritual de Prejóvenes es ofrecido como cultural and ecological

settings

un ejemplo de un esfuerzo por avanzar la throughout the world. System-

educación de inspiración bahá'í en la cual atic research and high quality

contribuciones modestas se acumulan y academic study are called for, not

llevan al progreso significativo. as isolated activities, but as com-

academic study are called for, not Bahá'í efforts in education have a

as isolated activities, but as com- ponents, albeit important

Bahá'í efforts in education have a ones,

ones, of a process in which the design

long history, dating back to the early of curricula is closely connect-

years of the Faith in Iran. Although ed with educational practice and

much has been achieved over the systematization of educational

decades, it has been clear to all who experience. (Office of Social

have contributed to these efforts that and Economic Development 6)

and the vision of what may be called

the vision of what may be called A concept that has been of

“Bahá'í education” is a distant one. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi

“Bahá'í education” is a distant one. In A concept that has been of

great as- sistance to those striving to

Effendi, we read that “there is as yet visualize

Effendi, we read that “there is as yet the gradual evolution of

visualize no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum”

no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum” effort throughout the Bahá'í

educational and that “the task of formulating a

and that “the task of formulating a recent decades is that of

world in system of education which would be

world in system of education which would be

“Bahá'í-in- spired education”—a term that

“Bahá'í-in- spired education”—a term that

officially recognized by the Cause, is

officially recognized by the Cause, is meant to suggest incremental

is and enforced as such throughout the

and enforced as such throughout the

contri- butions to both theory and

Bahá'í world, is one which the present- practice in

Bahá'í world, is one which the present- practice in

practice in day generation of believers cannot

practice in day generation of believers cannot the field that are inspired by the

Bahá'í obviously undertake, and which has to

Bahá'í obviously undertake, and which has to teachings. This concept has

allowed be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í

allowed be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í Bahá'ís to become fully

involved in

scholars and educationalists of the future” (qtd. in Hornby 212).
 by the
 That the emergence of Bahá’í will, in a
 education is a distant goal does not produce
 mean, of course, that there is not curricula
 a great deal of work to be done at education.
 present. A statement prepared at the per-
 Bahá’í World Centre in 1993 and ap-
 sought on
 proved by the Universal House of Jus-
 need
 tice suggests that
 expected
 from Bahá’í-inspired endeavors? How
 the gradual development of
 contents and methods of Bahá’í
 ideals?

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hundreds of educational endeavors,
 free from the pressure created
 expectation that these efforts
 relatively short span of time,
 the elements, principles, and
 of a comprehensive Bahá’í
 But even with this evolutionary
 spective, clarity should be
 what is to be achieved. What—we
 to ask—can reasonably be
 can they help us advance toward the
 realization of Bahá’í

To answer such questions, it is nec-
 essary to assess today’s educational
 little
 theory and practice, analyze the un-
 him
 derlying assumptions, and understand
 (Directives 22).
 the forces that determine the direc-
 tions in which the field of education
 written,
 moves. This is not the place to address
 such an enormous challenge, but an
 overall picture is apparent. In 1939,
 Shoghi Effendi wrote: “Let us be on
 nur-
 our guard lest we measure too strictly
 the Divine Plan with the standard of
 gen-
 men. I am not prepared to state that
 it agrees in principle or in method
 many
 with the prevailing notions now up-
 hard job to get the average person to
 do any deep thinking or even a
 meditation on the problems facing
 and the world at large”
 Although much time has passed
 since these statements were
 one can hardly argue that today’s
 situation is any better. Contempo-
 rary educational systems around the
 world seem just as impotent to
 ture mature minds. While the value
 of the experience and the ideas
 erated throughout the years is not
 being questioned, there are too
 thoughtful analyses of the

shortcom-
 permost in men’s minds, nor that it ings of current educational
 systems
 should conform with those imperfect, and processes for anyone to deny
 that
 precarious, and expedient measures the crisis of education has
 continued
 feverishly resorted to by agitated hu- to deepen over the decades.
 manity” (Bahá’í Administration 62). Cognizant of this profound
 crisis
 In this same passage, he asks for an in education, we need to reflect on
 the
 “uncompromising adherence to that Bahá’í community’s ability
 to advance
 which we believe is the revealed and in new directions. The claim I wish
 to
 express will of God, however perplex- make is that the ability to take
 signif-
 ing it might first appear, however at ificant strides in advancing
 Bahá’í-in-
 variance with the shadowy views, the spired education does exist, but
 much
 impotent doctrines, the crude theories, of it depends on our appreciation
 the idle imaginings, the fashionable of the nature and magnitude of the
 conceptions of a transient and trou- work—on how much we expect from
 blous age” (62). ourselves and how willing we are
 to do
 In the case of education, a letter the hard work required.
 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi A Bahá’í-inspired
 educational en-
 indicates that people “tend to be very deavor could be defined simply as
 an
 superficial in their thinking, and it effort carried out by a group of
 Bahá’ís
 would seem as if the educational sys- and other like-minded individuals
 in-
 tems in use are sorely lacking in ability spired by the vision and teachings
 of
 to produce a mature mind in a person the Bahá’í Faith. As such, it
 strives
 who has reached supposedly adult life! to incorporate Bahá’í
 principles in
 All the outside influences that sur- the content and the approaches of
 round the individual seem to have an its programs, particularly the
 prin-
 intensely distracting effect, and it is a ciples of the oneness of humankind,
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of equality between men and women, Revelation is “the calling and of the elimination of prejudice. It men” (Ad- inculcates a sense of world citizenship men,” according to and the virtues of an upright char- “incomparable in charac- actor. However, as far as educational which, with the practice per se is concerned, it simply tread under tries to adhere to the latest educational earth, and theories according to the training that holiness over all the Bahá’ís involved have received at from water and any given time—behaviorism a few Effendi, Advent decades ago, a combination of com- this re- putationalism and culturalism along far in the with an emphasis on behavioral objec- extraor- tives some time later, more recently a incomparable char- curious mixture of constructivism and emergence outcome-based curricula, and then phenomenon. It whatever may be coming next.² longest time, Alternatively, we could be some- the what more ambitious, and that is the then all of approach being proposed here. In that into case, we would value insights from es- process has tablished theories and draw on them notable when it is appropriate, but at the same powers of a time we would be engaged in a rigor-

Bahá’u’lláh’s into being of a new race of vent 17). “A race of Bahá’u’lláh, ter, shall be raised up feet of detachment, will all who are in heaven and on will cast the sleeve of that hath been created clay” (qtd. in Shoghi 32). What is rather obvious in gard is that no matter how future human beings of such dinary powers and actor are to appear, their will not be a sudden cannot be that for the human beings behave more or less same as they do today, and a sudden a new humanity comes being as if by magic. A to be set in motion by which changes in character and growing number of individuals

will
ous search for educational content and take deeper and deeper root
from gen-
eration to generation.
methods that would progressively en-
eration to generation.
Education—the
concepts, methods, and
dow each successive generation with
content of
the characteristics of a human race
which will have to
systematically de-
velop over time—will be a
entering the age of maturity.
most signif-
icant component of this
Shoghi Effendi writes that the “su-
preme and distinguishing function” of
There are a number of
process.
questions
that present themselves the moment
2 For a discussion of computationalism
we place such weighty
expectations on
and culturalism, see Jerome Bruner’s The
Bahá’í-inspired
education. Is what we
know about education today,
Culture of Education. For an incisive analysis
including
of the behavioral objectives model, see Joseph
the knowledge contained in
fields such
as sociology of
Dunne’s “Teaching and the Limits of Tech-
education, philosophy
of education, psychology,
nique: An Analysis of the Behavioural-Ob-
ethics, phi-
sophy of mind, and
jectives Model.” And for an overview of con-
neuroscience
sufficient to enable us to
neuroscience
educate souls
Soltis’s Perspectives on Learning.
who will “cast the sleeve
of holiness
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over all that hath been created from
has envisioned. And we need to
refine
these elements as we learn
water and clay” (Bahá’u’lláh qtd. in
from expe-
rience, articulate insights, and
Shoghi Effendi, Advent 32)? The an-
make
conceptual advances.
swer is clearly no, far from it.
The next question, then, is whether
Everything we do in this complex
there is enough knowledge in these
enterprise will present us with its
own
challenges; to meet them, we have to
fields to show us a way forward, at

least to enable us to take the first few steps in the desired direction. We can con- give an affirmative response to this pay second question, but in order to suc- interact ceed, we must follow the guidance and offered in the statement quoted at the beginning of this presentation. We should look at Bahá'í-inspired efforts profoundly as components of a long-term process of action and reflection in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. We should mind is a become well-versed in the theories aspects and practices of education and those lend fields closely associated with it. We such. should be engaged in a rigorous process to generate new knowledge that we can share openly. To advance in this process, we should view theories the and practices as sources of insight that enrich our own experience. At the same time, we should avoid fads, not make unreasonable claims, be Bahá'í-inspired humble, and cling scrupulously to the pur- highest standards of honesty and rec- to titude of conduct. We need to search in the rapidly growing river of knowl- edge flowing through the world for expe- clues and indications that would assist us in solving the innumerable puzzles we will find along the way. We need to identify one by one the elements of an educational process that will— education

organize and reorganize our process of action, reflection, study, and sultation. As we do so, we need to special attention to the way we with existing educational theories practices. How should we approach ideas, methods, and content of edu- cational models when we disagree with some of their underly- ing assumptions? For example, we do not believe that the human supercomputer. Yet, there are of the brain's functioning that themselves to its being treated as

The computationalism of the cog- nitive movement, then, does have in- sights to offer us when we are seek- ing to enhance certain aspects of workings of the mind. We must be able, however, to select appropriate aspects of computationalism to be incorporated into a educational endeavor for specific poses, while avoiding the tendency disregard a more holistic encounter with the human mind—a tendency that robs the teaching-learning rience of the richness it deserves.

The same holds for culturalism, to use another example, which is the complement to computationalism. Ac- cording to this perspective,

incrementally, to be sure—help cultivate the kind of person Bahá’u’lláh participants

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in processes that constantly negotiate, create, and recreate meaning. That of

culture plays a significant role in how works

human beings develop from infancy is an obvious fact with which no one can disagree. Yet, we believe that educa-

tional efforts should enable each gen-emo-

eration of youth to contribute more interaction.

decisively than the previous one to the construction of a new culture and a new civilization. Insights from the atti-

ories based on culturalism, therefore, penetrat-

are bound to be of some help to us. But no matter how much truth there affinity

is to the statement that knowledge is socially constructed, we cannot totally moved

subscribe to constructivism and deny prefer-

the existence of a reality that is the not

final arbiter determining the validity that

of the knowledge being constructed, self

or ignore the fact that this reality has both material and spiritual dimensions. judgments;

To be able to meet all such chal- lenges, we will have to rely on a robust framework for Bahá’í-inspired the

education, which we are only begin-

should initiate the young into a

helping them to become

it is required to accommodate every view in the pursuit of a hazy notion

inclusivity. Clearly, that which

is not equivalent to that which does not; claims should be supported by

evidence. But to examine evidence

orously, it is necessary to reject

tivism as a form of social

Emotivism—the doctrine that our judgments about truth are no more than expressions of preference,

tude, or feeling—has deeply

ed modern culture, and many strands of progressive education find

with its underlying premises. The resulting “emotivist” self is

only by personal feelings and

ences. For such an individual, it is

the choice between good and evil

matters, but the free rein given to

to choose. Thus, rational arguments contribute little to moral

agreements are to be reached through the expression of feelings and the force they exert. In the eyes of

emotivist, the world is a meeting

place
ning to elaborate. Working within
own
this evolving framework, Bahá'í-in-
preferenc-
spired efforts should be able to avoid
series
the extremes of both determinism
and radical constructivism and nur-
ture individuals whose constructive
is
powers of thought and action are not
governed by vain imaginings but are
ap-
harmonized with reality, with the will
per-
of God and His purpose for humanity.
Gaining insights from and carefully
ignored,
modifying elements of existing prac-
tices on the way to discovering new
and more effective ones calls for scien-
see
tific rigor. Science cannot advance if
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of individuals, all exerting their
will to accommodate their
es, and a stage that presents a
of opportunities for their enjoyment
and for the achievement of their own
satisfaction.³ This emotivist self
nurtured not only by mass media and
advertising, but also by educational
proaches that reduce morality to
sonal preference. In these approach-
es, divine purpose is at best
and the existence of truth, moral or
3 For an analysis of emotivism,
Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.
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otherwise, outside the subjective self
Bahá'í-in-
is denied. How different is the emo-
ourselves in
tivist self from the image the Bahá'í
have to borrow
Writings give of the human potential:
from cur-
rent educational theories and practices
O my servant! and, at the same time, be constantly
Thou art even as a finely tempered on guard lest we overlook the
adverse
sword concealed in the darkness effects that they can produce in
the
of its sheath and its value hidden psyche of the human being. We
can-
from the artificer's knowledge. not afford to forget that the
concepts,
Wherefore come forth from the categories, and principles that
the field
sheath of self and desire that thy of education has so far generated

will
worth may be made resplendent undergo fundamental
transformation,
and manifest unto all the world. one to which we should
contribute.
(Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Per- And we must find the
courage to elab-
sian no. 72) orate concepts inspired by the
Rev-
elation of Bahá'u'lláh that are being
O son of man! neglected today.
If thou lovest Me, turn away A brief examination of two
con-
from thyself; and if thou seekest cepts, those of
“understanding” and
My pleasure, regard not thine “spiritual qualities,” will
help us appre-
own; that thou mayest die in Me ciate the enormity of the work
before
and I may eternally live in thee. us as we try to advance in
Bahá'í-in-
(Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Ara- spired education.
Understanding has
bic no. 7) been a central theme in education
and
philosophy, but it needs to be recast
This reference to emotivism is meant in light of Bahá'u'lláh's
Revelation.
only to illustrate the care with which The notion of spiritual
qualities as a
we need to examine current education- category of the attributes of
the hu-
al theories and practices. Emotivism, of man soul has often been
neglected or
course, is just one of many doctrines lost in muddled narratives of
virtues,
that stand in direct opposition to the which include culture-specific
dispo-
kind of system of thought and practice sitions, social dexterities,
and mental,
that will, in the fullness of time, give rise as well as physical, skills.
There is
to those who, “incomparable in charac- much to be done to clarify
the nature
ter, . . . with the feet of detachment, of these constituent elements
of our
will tread under all who are in heaven being and how they are to be

system-

and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of
of un-
holiness over all that hath been created
qualities are
from water and clay” (Bahá’u’lláh qtd.
and Bahá’ís are
in Shoghi Effendi, Advent 32).
them at

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the appropriate level of depth both in
theory and in practice.

empirical,

Even a cursory survey of the Bahá’í
process

Writings impresses on us that for hu-
in

man beings to manifest the powers of
notion

the human spirit such as justice, hum-
understanding—for

ble service, pure and goodly deeds,
and love, both the individual and the
human race as a whole have to reach
new shores of understanding. To help
humanity move toward this goal, ed-
concep-

ucation is in need of a more accurate
depiction of the nature of under-
vision of the

standing. This is necessary if educa-
can-

tors are to transcend the dichotomy
either

between nature and nurture, between
be a

student-centered education and con-
subject

tent-focused education, and between
The

subjective and objective knowledge. It
con-

is time to free our thinking from the
to

grip of the duality we have inherited
from Locke and Rousseau and from

atically fostered. The concepts

derstanding and spiritual

intimately connected,

in a unique position to treat

of a single approach—whether be-
havioral, cognitive, cultural,

or constructivist. As well, the

of understanding is conceptualized

light of an explicit or implicit

of the subject of

example, as a highly complex comput-
er in computationalism, a negotiator
of values in culturalism, and so on.

For us, the process of understanding
will have to correspond to the

tion of the subject of understanding
evoked by Bahá’u’lláh’s

“new race of men.” Just as we

not separate this process from

its object or its subject, it would

mistake to sharply separate the

from the object of understanding.

understanding of a specific set of

cepts both demands and contributes

the development of certain relevant
intellectual and spiritual qualities

and the reductionism of educational fads. To nurture understanding, we have to deal with at least three interrelated intellectual, and inseparable entities: the “subject of understanding,” the student who possesses actual and latent intellectual and moral attributes; the “objects of understanding,” items of varying “understanding” in degrees of complexity that are to be grasped and acted upon; and the “process of understanding,” the process by which greater insight into reality and the way it is to be transformed is gained. The methods by which the student is helped to advance in understanding depend on that which is to be understood; thus, the process of understanding for different objects cannot be reduced to the application

attitudes. Reality is one, and there is unity between its physical, and spiritual dimensions. Concepts that help us understand this reality are not isolated and tained, but closely intertwined intermingling. So, this respect cannot be there is a boundlessness to it, turing it requires that we do not view it as a point of accomplishment—whether in terms of theory or practice—but as an ongoing engagement of the subject of understanding with its objects. In a certain sense, understanding is a notion that defies all manner of definition. It is not synonymous

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how the human mind sorts out and processes information; it is not merely a culminating point at which one arrives once certain facts are assimilated; it is not simply the conclusion reached after following one procedure or another; nor is it reducible to sound, person, to

When we examine carefully es in which the word is employed in the Bahá’í Writings, we see that it is not mentioned in the context of truths that we need to apprehend, but that it is often an adjective to describe the

rational judgments based on one's beliefs. Thus, understanding differs from both physical action—say, planting a tree—and mental occupation—say, thinking about how to plant the tree. It is also distinct from the mental activity involved in gathering and sorting information. All these contribute to understanding, especially when carried out purposefully, but they do not make up the process in its entirety. As one advances in understanding, at least in relation to substantive concepts, there are significant moments of insight and grasp of specific facts and meanings, but the process is more like moving forward along a path that, though marked by certain milestones, by no means has a predetermined end.⁴ According to this vision, in order to appreciate that one advances in his or her understanding of reality with the aid of God's grace and bestowals, Understanding is, ultimately, a gift bestowed by God: "First and foremost among these favors, which the

refer to an attribute of the understanding is intimately linked our state of being. Like qualities such as justice, love, and truthfulness, it is a element of who we are. Spiritual qualities are of divine attributes in the mirror the human heart, and the of these qualities defines the of the human soul to set itself on infinite journey toward God. Understanding, too, is a crucial factor of this capacity. Here, appears a profound connection between understanding and spiritual and in the context of education, between fostering spiritual qualities and nurturing understanding. This would be an obvious connection if we were to refer only to the understanding of concepts directly associated with specific qualities—to understand, for the notions of selfless giving, of givenness, and of sympathy in the velopment of generosity as a

Almighty hath conferred upon man," quality. But the claim being made here states Bahá'u'lláh, "is the gift of un- is much greater. Bahá'í-inspired educa- tional programs are being challenged to engage simultaneously in fostering 4 For a more extensive exploration of spiritual qualities and in nurturing this theme see my book, Moral Empower- understanding of concepts belonging ment: In Quest of a Pedagogy. not only to the spiritual realm, but also

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to the realms of the physical and so- actions, directing moral purpose to- ward that which has permanence. cial sciences, to literature and the arts, The comprehensive account of to history and political thought. This spiritual qualities to be is a call to scale the walls that tend to elaborated over time should address their separate education centered on the autonomous character and offer insights into the material and social aspects of human dynamics of interaction among existence from education focused on a them. Further, it should not lose moral and spiritual life. It is a call for a sight of their non-exhaustive, eternal level of integration that has not been nature, although it must explain achieved before. evolutionary

To meet the challenge of such in- changes in their meanings as humani- tegration, Bahá'í-inspired education ty advances from childhood to matu- rity. Spiritual qualities are needs a rich account of spiritual qual- rity. Spiritual qualities are not bound to their expressions in finite ities in a language sufficiently clear to contexts, no matter how much our capacity allow for the design and evaluation of to manifest them expands. They educational activity. This language exist on a transcendent plane, vital must embrace an expanded rationality, structures in that dimension of reality we drawing on the discourses of religion, call spiritual. science, the arts, and philosophy. In

developing such a language, we need words to avoid relativism and moral equiv- how one lency. The language has to set a path He toward the higher ground but avoid of the moralizing. There is a qualitative vari- on a ance between nobility and baseness aloud say- that should not be blurred. The de- heaven! sired language must be able to express radi- sensitivity to this contrast, motivating ef- us to aspire to lofty goals and to keep I am away from unworthy pursuits. revelation Moreover, a language that is to will serve as a vehicle for exploring spiri- tual qualities and for cultivating sus- and ceptibility to the contrast between the hem. I noble and the base must convey a vi- the sion of human existence that extends of beyond the requirements of day-to- kingdom day life. The understanding achieved instru- with its aid should enhance the abil- world, ity to distinguish between superficial unto all and lasting results of one's words and Advancing in Bahá'í-inspired Education

Although spiritual qualities are shape to express themselves in action, our

Ponder for a moment these of Bahá'u'lláh describing day, in the Garden of Ridván, “gazed on one of the Beauties Most Sublime Paradise, standing pillar of light, and calling ing: ‘O inmates of earth and Behold ye My beauty, and My ance, and My revelation, and My fulgence. By God, the True One! Trustworthiness and the thereof, and the beauty thereof. I recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank station, and hold fast unto My am the most great ornament of people of Bahá, and the vesture glory unto all who are in the of creation. I am the supreme ment for the prosperity of the and the horizon of assurance beings’” (Tablets 38).

transform the relationships that it. Service changes selfish

grumble to account of them cannot be limited exploita- to observable behavior. Yet, it is nec- and essary to have at least some qualita- posture tive measures of how we advance in manifested their acquisition. This is where the inseparable concept of service takes center stage. unites do- Service refers to acts that are directed fundamental by the twofold purpose of pursuing it one's own spiritual and intellectual indeed is a growth and contributing to the civi- to lization-building process, acts seeking race" the transformation of some aspect of (250). the essential relationships that define may human existence. In this connection, to the image of a path is being increas- Bahá'í-inspired ingly used in the Bahá'í community to mind visualize effort and movement as well extraordinary vision of as resilience in the face of difficul- ties and the ability to turn stumbling while blocks into stepping stones. A path accomplishments of service invites participation, and to participants advance along it at dif- it is ferent paces and strides. One does not indi- walk the path alone; there is faith in

selfless joy in giving, greedy tion to reciprocity and fairness, arrogant knowing to a humble of learning. Although it is through action, service is from one's state of being. It ing and being. At a most level, it is a requirement of what is to be human: "That one man who, today, dedicateth himself the service of the entire human (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings The argument presented so far be summarized as follows: In order advance significantly in education, we need to keep in Bahá'u'lláh's the human being who will walk this earth in the fullness of time; and being respectful of in the field of education, we need remember that in its present state incapable of cultivating such an vidual. Humbled by the realization

of the capacity of others and joy in their accomplishments. the magnitude of the work ahead, a growing number of us, together with In addition, the efficacy of service is other like-minded individuals, have to not to be evaluated merely by the perceived success or failure of an educational enterprise; the extent to which understanding has advanced and the necessary spiritual qualities have been developed is a more important factor to be considered. This is not an evaluation carried out by external observers, but by every single participant. Further, action—namely, the reality of service is not confined to specific actions, for service infuses the environment with the potency to progress

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both conceptual and practical, leadership is gained. The search for a proper conception of methods, and materials. In this way, understanding and a corresponding account of spiritual qualities is through a series of approximations, but one among the multitude of tasks to be addressed in the effort to curricular elements would emerge that could be shared with others engaged in similar endeavors. What is being suggested is that such a process, Bahá'í-inspired education. It seems reasonable at this point to ask for some indication of the efficacy of the approach being described here.

wide Bahá'í community, will advance that the theory and practice of education to as long as action is carried out with-education? in an evolving conceptual framework, evidence the knowledge being generated from Yet the various experiences is synthesized in a coherent manner, and models and that theories are considered sources of source insight and not truths to be adhered to at all costs. It is to be expected, of course, that in the pursuit of the dis- have tant goal of Bahá'í education, formi- settings is dable challenges will have to be met. Spiritual The earlier discussion of emotivism illustrates the kind of capacity that around is needed if we are to identify and analyze the false doctrines that tend to invade educational theory and Faith was practice. As is evident from the brief be- mention of the cognitive and other fifteen. movements, valuable insights can be gained from various educational theo- Bahá'í Faith rics, even when we disagree with some through of their basic assumptions. But our interactions with existing theory and practice constitutes only one compo- nent of our Bahá'í-inspired endeavors. implemented Many fundamental ideas in education have to be transformed and new ideas clear

Why should we be so confident adopting it will actually enable us advance in Bahá'í-inspired There is clearly no decisive to cite this early in the process. impressive accomplishments of en- deavors in the Bahá'í community have followed this approach is a of confidence. The number of such undertakings is not large, but wit- nessed the transformation they achieved in a diversity of reassuring. The Junior Youth Empowerment Program, now estab- lished in thousands of clusters the world, is a clear example. Many years ago, in Colombia, it was noticed that the Bahá'í attracting large numbers of youth tween the ages of twelve and They tended to form a very special kind of attachment to the and its ideals. Over the years, a systematic process of action and reflection on action, a program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth was developed and in an increasing number of regions. Reflection on the results made it

have to be elaborated as an ever-deeper understanding of the implications this

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age range was bound to specific cultures and historical circumstances and a

did not offer sufficient insight into the reality of a human being during early adolescence.

understand

It could be said that in the history of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, the story of the life of one between

stalwart youth, Rúhu'lláh Varqá, had verb "to sit,"

already falsified predominant theories about this age group. A different description of a junior youth gradually educational

emerged from action, reflection, study, wealth

and consultation and was recorded in Book 5 of the curriculum developed

con-

by the Ruhi Institute. The degree of transformation of tens of thousands of youngsters who have benefited

to

from the program is a testimony to the heart

efficacy of its content and the spiritual gener-

and social concepts that underlie it.

and

Two sets of ideas that have contributed to the accomplishments of the relationship

program are worth mentioning. One moral

addresses the relationship between the

that much of the literature on the characteristics of individuals in

for example, that words do not

around arbitrarily; the meaning of

concept comes partly from the connections it has with other

connections. These connections help us

the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Some

connections, such as the one

the noun "chair" and the

are obvious.

But not all connections are so

mediate. Bahá'í-inspired

endeavors can be guided by the

of meaning enshrined in the Sacred Writings to discover and create

connections among words and concepts

that go beyond the obvious and the immediate. The objective would be

open channels in the mind and

of a young person that would

ate profound insights into reality

the ways it can be transformed. Focus would be on the intimate

relationship

between language structure and

structure. The Human Temple, a

text- structure of language and the mind's Bahá'u'lláh's Súriy-i-moral structure, and the other deals address with the all-important question of For spiritual perception. As to the first, re-asso-peated reference in the Writings to the of a influence of utterance confirms the as vital role language plays in cultivating noteworthy the moral as well as the intellectual govern-powers of the individual. Language behavior. structure is extremely complex and text cannot be discussed in any depth here. verb Consideration of a few simple facts, "knowl-however, leads to valuable insights "observing," "thinking," into the relationship between the way words are organized in one's mind and Summons of the one's moral structure. It is evident, 72 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 26.4 2016

book inspired by Haykal,⁵ is a modest attempt to such an objective in the program. instance, that which is closely ciated in the language structure junior youth with a verb as common "to see" is assumed to have effects on the moral structure ing his or her thought and Thus the deliberate effort in that to connect in a natural way the "to see" with words such as edge," "mind,"

⁵ See Bahá'u'lláh, The Lord of Hosts.

and "understanding": seeing with the divided: light of the sun, seeing with the light exer-of knowledge, seeing with our mind, the seeing friends not strangers, and and thinking of unity. As to the question of spiritual perception, at least two interrelated of ideas need to be carefully examined. that

spiritual qualities tend to be we love with the heart, and we cise justice through the power of mind. This rift between feelings thoughts reduces our understanding of both and creates an artificial pic-ture of the interacting faculties the human soul. We must realize

The first idea is that the enhancement of spiritual perception requires the vitalized removal of veils covering the inner noble eye: the veils of passion and desire; of covetousness, greed, and envy; of as vain imagining and idle fancy; and of justice, egotism. The challenge before us is not just the suppression of inordinate artificially passions and desires, curbing greed and envy and restricting the operation of the ego in order to promote civility. in-

We would not be mistaken in assuming in that the human being Bahá'u'lláh envi- feeling take sions walking this earth in the future noteworthy will have succeeded in burning away cultivate the these veils. Bahá'í-inspired education, emanate in then, must enable the individual to divine rend asunder the veils that cover the aside inner eye. in

The second idea is that the en- hancement of spiritual perception youth requires setting aside the duality be- transformative tween mind and heart. Some schools of thought believe that emotions and to sentiments hinder the operation of rational thinking. Others recommend Em- suspending reason and objectivity so that emotions such as care and sym-

sentiments such as love and respect, which transcend the self, are by appropriate thoughts, just as thoughts are empowered by appropri- ate self-transcending emotions such as passion for truth, yearning for and attraction to beauty. In refusing to make an sharp distinction between thoughts and sentiments, we acknowledge that there is a spiritual as well as an tellectual dimension to perception which both thinking and part. In this respect, it is how even a small effort to perception of forces that the realm of the spirit, such as confirmation and hope, and to set the duality between heart and mind treating a theme such as excellence has appealed to so many junior and has exerted such a influence on their lives. The intention of this reference some of the ideas that have helped define the Junior Youth Spiritual powerment Program is to illustrate how we can make incremental advanc-

pathy can manifest themselves.⁶ Even in Bahá'í-inspired education. The assertion being made is that modest achievements of this nature will accumulate and lead to significant progress. What is required is for more and more of us to fix our eyes on the vision of the human being and the future civilization revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, to gain a more profound understanding of the attributes of that human being, and, through a systematic process of action, reflection, study, and consultation, move toward the goal of Bahá'í education. In this endeavor, we should not attach ourselves to fashionable educational models. We should create a culture that does not favor fads or the dominance of technique over substance. We must do our best to integrate spiritual insights gained from the study of the Bahá'í teachings and from our experience in applying them to the life of humanity with knowledge generated through painstaking scientific research.

6 See, for example, Nel Noddings's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. See also, *Advancing in Bahá'í-inspired Education*, p. 73.

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