

To

Bahá'ís, education is of fundamental importance. The purpose of education, from

a Bahá'í point of view, is to fulfil the spiritual, intellectual, physical and

practical potential of each individual. This will not only bring happiness to each person but will enable them to contribute to the general welfare of the world of humanity. The Bahá'í Writings say:

“The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind...”

The

different aspects of education are explained in this way:

“... education is of

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...

Human education, however, consists in

civilisation and progress, that is, sound governance, social order, human welfare, commerce and industry, arts and sciences, momentous discoveries, and great undertakings....

As to divine education, it...consists in

acquiring divine perfections. This is indeed true education...”

Spiritual

and Moral Education

The divine perfections mentioned above are what we call moral qualities or virtues, such as kindness, generosity, honesty, trustworthiness and so on.

Bahá'ís see acquiring these virtues as the fundamental part of educating a child. All else flows from this.

For this reason, most Bahá'í communities run weekly children's classes in their local area. These are for all children, not just the children of

Bahá'ís, and the main purpose for the early years is to teach the different virtues, and how they can be practised and developed. Bahá'ís want to help each child to fulfil their potential and to become a force for good, for:

“Every child is potentially the light of the world...”

Universal

Education

Bahá'ís

lay great stress on unity. This is made easier if we understand one another's point of view. According to the Bahá'í Writings:

“...inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction... Universal education is a universal law.”

In most countries Bahá'í children will attend an existing local school. However, in those countries where education is not universally and freely available, the Bahá'í community will set up a school for the use of the local population. Here, adults as well as children have the opportunity to learn.

An unusual feature of Bahá'í beliefs is that, if there is no free schooling and parents are forced to make a choice, then priority should be given to daughters rather than sons:

“...most important of all is the training of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child.”

The Curriculum

Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote:

“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”

Education is therefore about finding, encouraging and developing the talents of each child:

“Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art.”

Music is also an important aspect of education, for “...music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart.”

As Bahá'ís look towards the development of a world civilisation, a common curriculum would be helpful:

“Education is essential and all standards of training and teaching throughout the world of mankind should be brought into conformity and agreement; a universal curriculum

should be established...”

Bahá'ís

believe that there should be a world language and script, chosen or invented, which would be taught in all schools:

“They would, in this way, be acquiring only two languages, one their own native tongue, the other the language in which all the peoples of the world would converse.”

One

of the basic Bahá'í principles is that individuals should investigate truth for themselves. Bahá'í children are therefore encouraged to learn about different beliefs and to respect them. Indeed, Bahá'ís see all religions as part of the same one religion of God, revealed in different places and at different times throughout the ages.

Bahá'ís

teach their children to see themselves as world citizens so that prejudices of gender, race or nation will not appear and they will appreciate that we all hold responsibility for our common home, this earth.

Junior

Youth

Bahá'ís

use the term “junior youth” to describe those aged from about 11 to 14, who are at a stage when they are thinking about the world and their place in it.

Bahá'ís

and friends run local junior youth groups for young people of this age. In these groups the young people learn to value themselves and to think carefully about the world around them – recognising the power and true nature of much advertising material, for example. The young people are encouraged to develop a sense of service, and to this end they plan and carry out projects which are of service to their community. The Bahá'í Writings say, of children:

“Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.”

This

should be a good basis for the rest of their lives.

Methods

of Education

There

is no overall educational method specified in the Bahá'í Writings. However, there are a number of guidelines. For example:

“Many elementary sciences must be made clear to them in the nursery; they must learn them in play, in amusement. Most ideas must be taught them through speech, not through book-learning. One child must question the other concerning these things and the other must give the answer. In this way they will make great progress.”

Children should be encouraged to think for themselves – to investigate and weigh the evidence before them with an open mind.

Lifelong
Education

Bahá'ís continue with their education for the whole of their lives. From the age of 15 they join together with others in study circles where they explore how to lead a spiritual life, and learn how to run children's classes, junior youth groups and other community-building activities. Many people who are not Bahá'ís enjoy these study circles, where everyone's opinion is valued. They are happy to join the Bahá'ís in running children's classes or junior youth groups for the benefit of everyone.

Bahá'ís believe that humanity will have a glorious future. As education becomes universal and spiritually based, amazing results will follow. Ignorance will no longer hold us back from realising that we are all one human family, that we all share one planet and that we need to build a peaceful world together, for:

“Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent.”

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METADATA

Views18021 views since posted 2000-06; last edit 2026-05-15 23:16 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../warwick_bahai_education;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

Language

English

Permission

editor and publisher

History

Formatted 2000 by Graham Sorenson.

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/625

Citation: ris/625

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