

Essential features of wisdom education in Bahá'í schooling

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Terminology, Definitions and Notes

Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1982) it is the second most widespread religion after Christianity throughout the world. Consequently, the believers come from virtually every cultural, racial, social and religious background. The pivotal concept of the Bahá'í Faith is the oneness of humankind. In the words of William Hatcher and Douglas Martin (1985, pp. xiii-xvii):

Bahá'u'lláh's central message is that the day has come for the unification of humanity into one global family. He asserts that God has set in motion historical forces that are bringing about worldwide recognition that the entire human race is a unified, distinct species. This historical process in which, Bahá'ís believe, their faith has a central role to play, will involve the emergence of a global civilisation.

In the words of Shoghi Effendi (n.d.)

The Bahá'í Faith recognises the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, advocates compulsory education, abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent universal peace.

Manifestations of God

The Manifestations of God are the Prophet Founders of each religion, such as Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, The Bab and Bahá'u'lláh. The Manifestations of God reveal to humanity the Word of God and teach how to live according to the Will of God.

Bahá'u'lláh (The Glory of God)

Bahá'u'lláh, a Manifestation of God and a Universal Educator of humanity, is the Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. He was born on 12 November 1817 in Tihiran, the capital city of Persia. His family was one of the noblest and wealthiest of the time and His generosity earned Him the title of 'Father of the poor'. He proclaimed the oneness of the world of humanity and taught that all are created by one God. The kings of the East and the priesthood of Persia arose against Him, as their personal interests would not advance through His Teachings. Bahá'u'lláh's properties and possessions were confiscated, and He was persecuted and put in prison for what he believed and proclaimed. This led to a series of banishments from Persia to Baghdad, then to Constantinople, then to Adrianople and finally to the prison-fortress in Akka. Bahá'u'lláh passed away on 29 May 1892 in Bahji, a house three miles outside Akka.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son and successor of Bahá'u'lláh, was the interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the Centre of His Covenant.

Shoghi Effendi, also known as The Guardian

Shoghi Effendi was the great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, the interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the Head of the Bahá'í Faith after 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Universal House of Justice

This is the World Governing Body of the Bahá'í Faith today, residing in Haifa, Israel, and consisting of nine members elected from the Bahá'ís of the World through a democratic system.

Yahweh/YHWH

The name of God in the Hebrew Scriptures is now generally written as YHWH. Some earlier writing quoted may use the designation Yahweh.

NOTES

Gender-inclusive/exclusive language

Reference to 'he' and 'his' are numerous throughout the texts quoted, due to these texts' chronological, historical and religious context. Adding [sic] after each instance of gender non-inclusive language detracts from the quotations' meanings and impinges greatly on the fluency of reading, due to the large number of instances. Therefore, I have left quotations in their original form. However, the term [sic] has been used in the general text where necessary.

Abstract

This thesis explores wisdom education, in theory and practice, at a Bahá'í-inspired school. As background for this research, the thesis investigates the concept of wisdom, taking into account representative voices from philosophy (Socrates), psychology (Sternberg) and Biblical studies (*Proverbs*), and undertaking a detailed analysis of wisdom as a central idea in Bahá'í thought and Bahá'í education.

The data for the research into Bahá'í education was collected at Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute (NCCI), a Bahá'í-inspired school committed to wisdom education. NCCI, located in Stratford, Canada, provides a solid foundation for education through the twin pillars of 'achieving academic excellence' and a 'clear moral framework'. NCCI asserts that the centre of the educational experience is their commitment to nurturing and inspiring qualities of the spirit, emphasizing that the spiritual life of their students is an important element of their overall development.

The data collected was analysed through the strategies and techniques of interpretive ethnography in educational research. The sources for generating the data were: participant observation, interviews and document/curriculum analysis.

After critical analysis of the data, it became apparent that wisdom in this school is understood to be more than knowledge and experience. Wisdom is an educational process involving:

- An innate capacity within each individual to become wise.
- The stimulus of this innate wisdom capacity through exploring fields of both spiritual and material knowledge.
- An acquired understanding of these spiritual and material worlds that increases the potential for good in individual and collective lives.
- Making informed and beneficial moral and life decisions based on this acquired

understanding, which becomes an integral part of the person's life experience.

- Reflection on decisions made and actions taken, which enables the individual to gain a new level of understanding for seeking knowledge and making better decisions.

Also, it became apparent that the acquisition of wisdom is more than seeking knowledge from the elders, God and the environment. There was a strong consensus amongst the informants that education is a vital instrument to stimulate the development of the innate wisdom in their students. This was evident by the way the school emphasised the implementation of the *19 Moral Capabilities* (Appendix Three) and promoted spiritual awareness, employed the technique of consultation, implemented the concept of mentorship, upheld the principle of Unity in Diversity, and used performing arts through dance and theatre workshops to enhance social, moral and spiritual understandings.

The model of wisdom education investigated in the research undertaken in this thesis offers a valuable model for exploring wisdom education in a wide range of contemporary schools in Australia.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Tahereh Pourshafie

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