

# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **The Role of Education in the Acquisition of Wisdom from a Bahá'í Perspective**

### **Introduction**

Sternberg, (2004, p. 167) proposes several reasons that schools should teach wisdom:

...knowledge is insufficient for wisdom and certainly does not guarantee satisfaction or happiness. Wisdom seems a better vehicle to the attainment of these goals....wisdom provides a mindful and considered way to enter considered and deliberative values into important judgments....wisdom represents an avenue to creating a better, more harmonious world....students who later will become parents and leaders, are always part of a greater community and hence will benefit from learning to judge rightly, soundly, or justly on behalf of their community.

This thesis explores wisdom education, in theory and practice, at a Bahá'í-inspired school. This chapter introduces the researcher's Bahá'í orientation, the significance of wisdom and education in the Bahá'í community, the perceived need for wisdom education in contemporary society – as suggested by Sternberg – and an outline of the research undertaken in this thesis.

### **Ideological perspective**

The purpose and nature of education can be explored through various branches of knowledge such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, environmental and cross cultural studies, and scientific and religious studies. Each of these perspectives may give us valuable insight into the philosophy of education, humanity's need for it and how it can be implemented to achieve the desired result.

This thesis will assume the perspective of the Bahá'í community, which believes that education deals with the whole human being – body, mind and spirit. Education is viewed as a catalyst in the development of the powers and capacities latent within each individual, especially the capacity of wisdom. Education and training should equip the individual to live harmoniously with nature, be an emotionally balanced individual with sound knowledge of the various branches of the sciences and arts, and be strongly committed to the betterment of the world.

## **Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith**

The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion founded by Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) in Iran. Bahá'u'lláh means the 'Glory of God'. The word Bahá'í derives from baha ('glory' or 'splendour') and means a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, who was exiled from Iran to various places within the Ottoman Empire. In 1868, Bahá'u'lláh was sent as a prisoner to the fortress city of Akka in Palestine. He passed away in 1892 in Akka.

In His will, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His eldest son Abdul-Bahà (1844-1921) to lead the Bahá'í community and to interpret the Bahá'í writings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in turn appointed his eldest grandson Shoghi Effendi (1896-1957) as his successor and authorised interpreter of the Bahá'í teachings. Today the affairs of the world-wide Bahá'í community are administered by the elected governing body of the Universal House of Justice.

In its embryonic form, the Bahá'í community comprises people from many social, national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1982, p. 731), the membership of the Bahá'í Faith 'has spread to virtually every country in the world...'. In the *Promise of World Peace*, the

Universal House of Justice (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, 1986, p. 26) describes the Bahá'í community as '...a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family....conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles...'

Bahá'ís believe that the purpose of life is to know and to worship God, and to foster an ever-advancing civilisation. Bahá'ís strongly believe that they have a blueprint for global education through the writings of their Prophet-founder, Bahá'u'lláh, his successor 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith (Universal House of Justice, 1984). The following passage from Shoghi Effendi (1980, p. v) illustrates briefly some of the major principles of the Bahá'í Faith:

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.

### **The significance of wisdom in Bahá'í thought**

Wisdom is referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, as 'the greatest gift and the most wondrous blessing [that] hath ever been and will continue to be'. Bahá'u'lláh (1988a, p. 66) states that wisdom is 'man's unfailing Protector' and that it is through wisdom that 'the loftiness of man's station is made manifest and evident'. Bahá'u'lláh (1988a, p. 66) refers to the educating influence of

wisdom and states that through wisdom ‘earthly beings have become imbued with a gem-like spirit which outshineth the heavens’.

Bahá’u’lláh (1988a, p. 150) further claims that ‘the beginning of Wisdom and the origin thereof is to acknowledge whatsoever God hath clearly set forth’ in holy books, revealed through the Manifestations of God.

Bahá’u’lláh (1988a, p. 155) states in one of His *Tablets* that ‘the essence of wisdom is the fear of God...’. The concept of the fear of God is explained in the Bahá’í writings mainly as ‘awe’ and ‘reverence’. The Bahá’í understanding, as expressed by Shoghi Effendi in explaining the fear of God to children, is that:

... we don’t fear God because He is cruel, but we fear Him because He is Just, and, if we do wrong and deserve to be punished, then in His Justice He may see fit to punish us. We must both love God and fear Him (Shoghi Effendi, 1939a, p. 237).

It is also explained in the Bahá’í writings that the majority of human beings need the element of fear in order to discipline their conduct. One would fear God ‘in the sense of a child fearing the righteous anger and chastisement of a parent; not cringe before Him as before a tyrant, but know His Mercy exceeds His Justice’ (Universal House of Justice [n.d.], in Hornby, 1999, p. 239).

The Bahá’í writings state that the first and the most important concept that the children should be taught at school is the Oneness of God and the Laws of God. An awareness of the Oneness of God engenders an inculcation of the love of God. To love God is to obey God and guard against disappointing a loving Father.

The term ‘fear of God’, used to define the essence of wisdom, serves as a measure designed to prevent making harmful choices, the outcome of which would influence

both the individual and the society. An analysis of the Bahá'í writings shows that the term fear of God and its connection with wisdom are used on numerous occasions to highlight the need for uprightness of character and to warn human beings against making adverse life choices.

Bahá'u'lláh's exhortations on wisdom and the fear or love of God are to guide individuals to be just and united. Referring to the necessity of the fear of God, which stems from love of God, Bahá'u'lláh (1976, p. 250) states that the fear and love of God prevent one from doing 'injustice to anyone, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed'. The fear of God prevents one from sowing 'the seeds of dissension amongst men' (Bahá'u'lláh, 2002, p. 200).

It should be noted that the term 'wisdom' in the Bahá'í writings is associated with many attributes. Some of the dimensions of wisdom employed in Bahá'í writings are exercising tact, discretion, understanding, moderation and intuition. Wisdom also is associated with qualities such as kindness, patience, love and consideration. For example, in order to share the word of God with others, Bahá'ís are encouraged to employ wisdom to 'display divine tolerance, love, kindness, patience, a goodly character, and holy deeds' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978, p. 268). Human beings are warned not to allow 'human learning' to cause them to 'wax proud before God', as 'true wisdom is to fear God, to know Him and to recognise His Manifestations' (Bahá'u'lláh, 2002, p. 231).

In the Bahá'í writings, wisdom is sought in order to open the inner eye and the inner ear. The attainment of wisdom opens one's heart to the inner realities of all things. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1978, p. 140) states:

It is the longing desire of Abdu'l-Bahá to see each one of you accounted as the foremost professor in the academies, and in the school of inner significances, each one becoming a leader in wisdom.

### **The importance of education in the Bahá'í community**

One of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith is universal education. Bahá'ís believe that through education the potentialities of intellectual, moral and spiritual faculties in human beings are nurtured and the consciousness of global citizenship established.

In *Turning Point for All Nations*, a statement of the Bahá'í International Community (1995, p. 5) on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations, Bahá'ís state:

The Bahá'í International Community regards the current world confusion and the calamitous condition of human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race...

One purpose of Bahá'í education is to examine contemporary problems from a global perspective and view them as interdependent. Thus the facilitation and nurturing of values in education that equip the individual to live in a harmonious social environment are absolutely crucial. Bahá'í education promotes a sense of self-worth and excellence. Bahá'ís believe that education should address the needs of the present day society and offer a perspective of nurturing a holistic understanding of life. The purpose of education is to allow the process of reflection and behaviour to strengthen the individual's sense of identity and commit him or her to the purpose of life, which is to know and love God.

From the Bahá'í perspective, education is more than the acquisition of selected knowledge about science, psychology, environment, history or cultures. Education is

concerned with enabling people to function positively and effectively in diverse social situations. This concept prescribes that schools teach, through creating a suitable environment, the development of certain basic qualities, values, virtues and characteristics and provide students with the essential insight to apply these for the benefit and in the service of humanity.

The nature of Bahá'í education is connected with the understanding of the nature of human beings. The Bahá'í belief considers human beings to have two natures, one which concerns itself with materialism and is self-centred, and the other which deals with the inner being or the soul. Bahá'ís contend that in contemporary society, the humane, spiritual side of human beings has not developed as fast as the material side. This imbalance is reflected in decisions that are made in all social affairs whether they are educational, economic, political or environmental.

Regarding the role and responsibility of the individual within a society and the station of the human being, the Bahá'í writings state that:

The honour and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 2).

Bahá'ís understand from the above quote that the 'honour and distinction of the individual' does not consist in becoming solely the best physician, architect or plumber, but rather in utilising the above learnt knowledge and skill for the 'social good'.

The Bahá'í Faith considers education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilisation. However, this education should encompass not only the physical aspect but also individuals' spiritual education. The Bahá'í writings define education as consisting of three kinds: material education, concerned with the progress and development of the body; human education, concerned with civilisation and progress; and spiritual education, concerned with acquiring divine attributes and qualities.

Material education is common to both humans and animals. Human education, which is found in the sciences and arts, trades, government, inventions and administrations, pertains only to humans. Spiritual education is the most important education, as '...in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness" (Bahá'í International Community, *The Need of an Educator*, Cf. Gen. 1:26, p. 8). This is the world's goal for humanity.

The purpose of education is to nurture a deep sense of commitment in individuals to reflect principles of justice and unity, and to help develop a sense of world citizenship in which not only the local or national community is of interest but also the whole world is considered as one. When the interest of the whole of humanity becomes important, the history of humanity advancing toward a unified world civilisation is envisaged and the consciousness of the role of the individual to help advance this process is developed.

The Bahá'í writings place a strong emphasis on the role of parents in educating their children to understand the true purpose and nature of education, and to be able to implement these goals in their daily lives. The Bahá'í writings state:



... it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 398)

According to the Bahá'í perspective, the education of girls is given primary importance. Girls should be given preference in receiving education because they are the first educators of humanity in their role as mothers.

The family unit is the first to educate the children for a unified world view. The parents hold the responsibility for familiarising their children with the concept of the Oneness of Humanity. It is in the family that children can be trained to realise that differences of colours, class, ethnic background, language, gender, nationality and religion do not make one individual greater than another in the sight of God.

Children have to be given a vision that learnt social values not only apply to the family but also to national and international circles. In this way, the East and the West can meet and the world of humanity can be unified.

The education of children and youth is of such importance that Bahá'í writings praise the work of teachers and educationalists, and regard them in very high esteem. The teacher's service is considered as true worship of God and a most meritorious deed.

In summary, from a Bahá'í perspective, education plays a twofold purpose. Firstly, education is a lifelong process which develops the capacities latent in human nature, thus transforming the individual. Secondly, education serves as a powerful tool for profound societal transformation. From the Bahá'í point of view, education is compulsory. It is the obligation of every family and the responsibility of the entire community. The Bahá'í view is that education which is comprehensive in nature can

bring about a genuinely civilised world. However, social change can happen only when both the individual is transformed and new social structures are embraced and nurtured.

### **The lack of wisdom in contemporary education**

There is a body of literature which draws our attention to the fact that we are living in an unbalanced world. While humanity has been advancing in technology, science and other specialised fields of knowledge at an incredible rate, the consideration of how one human being relates to another has declined. Roszak's (1973, p. 157) inference is that:

... the one-sided objectivity of science prevents the integration of what we study into a moral or metaphysical context. Consequently, we spend less time and energy seeking wisdom and depth.

A number of thinkers argue that there is an overemphasis on information technology and scientific achievement, which results in an alienation of people from the natural processes of social interaction and responsibility. A lack of attention to moral and spiritual factors hinders human beings' spiritual development and the subsequent acquisition of wisdom. Sherrard (1987) is of the view that science has the potential for tragic implications, such as dehumanisation of both humankind and society, which will lead to loss of identity and control. In terms of education, Beare and Slaughter (1993, p. 15) point to the fact that schools have been put in an impossible position due to 'compulsive technological dynamism, competitive individualism and a radical loss of meaning and purpose...'.

Fan (2004, p. 3), referring to the modern education system, states that

'[d]evelopment of human creativity and spirituality along with translating knowledge

into wisdom has been largely ignored'. In her discussion she states that modern education has its roots in seventeenth and eighteenth century science, and perpetuates a reliance on science and technology to solve the problems of Western society. Thus the educational system has focused on giving students knowledge in order to equip them to find jobs or do research. Fan (2004, p. 3) quotes Evans, who states that:

Not only are we surrounded by technology developed from scientific research; we are also educated, persuaded, and required to adopt and utilise the methods of science to solve social, business, and personal problems. The notion that science and technology can solve all problems is well established in Western society.

If the problem has to be addressed at its roots, it seems superficial to blame science and technology as such for humanity's misfortunes. Rather, it is humanity's obsession with science and technology that is the cause. Laszlo (1989, pp. 25-26), a scientist, philosopher and former chair of the Club of Rome, succinctly points to the real cause of current global problems. He insists it is not 'the world' that is the cause of our problems, but rather it is the 'human beings' who inhabit it. He adds:

... that only by redesigning our thinking and acting, not the world around us, can we solve them [our problems]. The critical but as yet generally unrecognised issue confronting mankind is that its truly decisive limits are inner, not outer (Laszlo, 1989, pp. 25-26).

Khursheed (1995, p. 13) agrees, arguing that our problems are fundamentally due to 'an inner sickness, a mental divide'. It is this inner sickness that must be dealt with first in order to achieve the necessary balance. Sternberg (2004, p. 167) states: 'If the future is plagued with conflict and turmoil, this instability does not simply reside *out there somewhere*; it resides and has its origin *in ourselves*.'

According to these thinkers, wisdom is needed to address the inner sickness of human beings and facilitate living a balanced life. One of the places in which wisdom can be facilitated and help transform society is the school. The school administration, curricula and staff can have a great impact on students' lives. Schools play a major role in nurturing the individual to develop to the best of their potential, and to contribute purposefully and meaningfully to the unification of the human race. Wise students understand the importance of the interconnectedness of the universe and will make every effort to be builders of unity. With the emergence of the new paradigm of global consciousness, schools can play a significant role in enhancing students' understandings about the need for world peace, justice and unity. Fan (2004) quotes Professor Dwight Allen, who states that:

Unfortunately, in our schools children are more likely to be learning about a world that no longer exists. Knowledge is power; ignorance is oppression. We are oppressed if we don't know, understand, and appreciate our neighbours around the world. We need this knowledge to understand why they act the way they do, what they believe in, and what they consider to be important... . Clearly, simply studying cultures is not enough. Kids must appreciate those cultures. Teachers must become the translators of cultural difference. A child from any nation in the world may be in their classroom tomorrow, and different cultures are just down the street. We need to teach our children to celebrate diversity and the creative human spirit (Fan, 2004, pp. 2-3).

Wise parents, teachers and care-givers will understand that it is no longer sufficient to edify the material side of one's being and existence. The humane, spiritual side of one's being needs to be emphasised and made one's priority. Fan (2004, p. 1) explains the goal of integrated education to be the consideration of a student as a whole person, stating:

The goal is not about how to find a good job or make big money, but about how to develop a complete human being. Every part of the individual – mind, body, emotion and spirit, should be developed at the same time and be integrated into the whole person.

Hence, there is a need for today's society to go beyond scientific rationalism, particularly when compiling school curricula. The acquisition of knowledge has to be interrelated with all parts of the human being. Education has to acknowledge the individual's body, mind and spirit. Currently, what is lacking is balance. In order to gain that balance, wisdom is needed.

### **The absence of research on wisdom in Bahá'í education**

The primary reason for this research is what Birren and Fisher (1990, p. 332) lucidly describe in their overview of Sternberg (1990):

It is hoped that research on wisdom will help to develop useful tools to assist world and national leaders in the increasingly complex problems facing humanity. Many crucial decisions, from nuclear waste to water use, face leaders and policy makers each day. Thus, wisdom is not simply for wise people or curious psychologists; it is for all people and the future of the world.

There are many materials, both secular and spiritual on the concept of wisdom.

Within the Bahá'í community, the Bahá'í sacred writings are replete with references to the importance of wisdom. However, as far as this researcher has been able to determine, no major/significant research has been done on wisdom education in Bahá'í schools, nor has any study been undertaken of the understandings of staff and students about the concept of wisdom and its implementation.

Moreover, it is envisioned that on the one hand, the investigation process will provide participants, including the researcher, with the opportunity to reflect on the theory of wisdom, and gain a deeper understanding of the concept of wisdom and how it can be better facilitated at Bahá'í or Bahá'í-inspired schools, while on the other hand, the secular world may benefit from the views of the Bahá'í community, whose members come from many cultural backgrounds and view the inherent dignity of human beings as an essential ingredient of the educational paradigm.

### **Site of the study**

This study took place at Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute (NCCI), an accredited Canadian private, co-educational, residential international high school for grades 7-12. NCCI is a Bahá'í-inspired school, which means that the organic constitution of this Bahá'í Educational Institution derives its energy and authority from the Bahá'í principles – its philosophy is based on Bahá'í principles. Indeed, all the Bahá'í institutions around the world serve as the testing ground for students of all ages to acquire and apply the Bahá'í principles.

NCCI promotes achieving academic excellence and developing the students' full academic potential, as is stated in the Bahá'í writings. NCCI also offers students a clear moral framework consisting of *19 Moral Capabilities* through which students can achieve success in all aspects of human relations and can develop their characters. These capabilities, explained in the school's statement, harmonise with the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## Overview

This thesis explores wisdom education, in both theory and practice, at a Bahá'í-inspired school. Chapter Two outlines the ethnographic research paradigm and the research techniques/methods used to investigate the role of Bahá'í schools in facilitating wisdom in education. It discusses the researcher's role in relation to the research and the methods employed to analyse the data. In particular, it delineates the sources and collection of data, describes how they were organised and analysed, and clarifies how the findings were formulated. In conclusion, some of the limitations of the research process are explored.

Chapters Three, Four and Five explicate the Bahá'í writings and three classic disciplines to generate a conceptual framework on wisdom. In particular, the framework outlines the Bahá'í philosophy and its fundamental teachings of the Oneness of God, Oneness of Religion and Oneness of Humanity. These fundamental teachings generate a conceptual context in which to investigate the concept of wisdom education from a Bahá'í perspective. Chapter Four explores the Bahá'í concept of wisdom from the Bahá'í writings in order to present a conceptual framework. The framework is used to observe and analyse the practice of wisdom education in a Bahá'í-inspired school. Chapter Five presents three theoretical perspectives of wisdom: philosophy, through the representative figure of Socrates; psychology, through Sternberg; and Biblical studies, through the *Proverbs*.

Chapter Six reviews works of the selected Bahá'í authors in relation to wisdom education. In this chapter the selected authors explore their understanding of how an educational system should be designed and conducted, based on their understandings

of the Bahá'í writings and their experiences in the field of Bahá'í education as administrators, educators, directors and consultants.

Chapters Seven and Eight focus on ethnographic reporting, analysis and interpretation of the findings from the data gleaned from interviews, participant observation and curriculum documents. However, each of these chapters has its own research focus. Chapter Seven discusses the analysis and classification of the data derived from the participants' response to the questions 'what is wisdom?' and 'what are its components according to the participants in the interviews?' The focus of Chapter Eight is the analysis and classification of how wisdom is acquired in theory, according to the same participants, as well as how a Bahá'í-inspired school addresses this issue in practical terms.

In each of these chapters, (i) the data is reported from the interview transcripts, participant observation and curriculum documents, and a sample of quotations is shared in the appendices (Appendix One and Appendix Two); (ii) these findings are then interpreted and synthesised in sub-categories; and finally (iii) these sub-categories are compared with the conceptual frameworks reported earlier.

Chapter Nine offers a synopsis of the '*wisdom process*' deduced from the data analysis. This chapter also explores a correlation of the '*wisdom process*' with the three classic disciplines of philosophy, psychology and Biblical studies, and refers to the practice of wisdom education in a Bahá'í-inspired school, correlating the experiences with the '*wisdom process*'. Finally, it offers some suggestions for future studies and the implementation of wisdom education.



## **Chapter Two: Research Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the ethnographic research paradigm and the research techniques/methods used to investigate the role of Bahá'í schools in facilitating wisdom in education. It discusses the role of the researcher in relation to the research and the methods employed to analyse the data. In particular, this chapter delineates the sources of the data and their collection, describes how they were organised and analysed, and clarifies how the findings were formulated. In conclusion, it explores some of the limitations of the process.

### **Overall research paradigm – interpretive research**

The overall research paradigm adopted for this study is interpretive in nature. Interpretive research is an approach which investigates the meaning or understandings involved in human activities. Interpretive research encompasses a world view that concerns 'the conditions for the possibility of multiple ways of knowing, with a focus on the ontological basis for knowledge, that is, the knowledge gained through, and of, experience' (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p. 87). It characterises how people experience the world and the ways they interact together.

Interpretive research begins with the assumption that:

... access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. The philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Boland, 1985).

It is concerned with the understanding of people, their actions and the events that occur when they are participants/informants.

Smith (2000, p. 95) explains that in:

... social research the interpretivist approach places a priority on searching for and interpreting what is happening and being done, according to the interpretations of the participants in the social setting being studied. It recognises as crucial the meanings of social actions to those who are acting.

Through the interpretive research process, both the observer's and the informants' senses of perception are sharpened and their insight is increased.

In the context of this thesis, the interpretive paradigm facilitates research into the role of Bahá'í schools in students' acquisition of wisdom. The interpretive paradigm facilitates a detailed description of the school setting, and local understandings and perspectives. One of the methods of inquiry employed in this research that lends itself well to the interpretive approach is ethnography, which is concerned particularly with human behaviour in social and cultural settings.

## **Research setting**

Initially, this study was to be based on a core group of carefully selected key informants. It was envisaged that approximately twenty five key informants would be identified in twenty five different Bahá'í schools around the world. The informants would be selected on the criteria of their willingness to collaborate, availability, geographical location and expertise in the field of education. They would be professional educationalists holding positions of influence, such as school principals, or those with significant responsibilities in management and curriculum development in their institution. However, after a year of correspondence, due to lack

of time on the informants' part to communicate regularly, it was decided to select one school for an in-depth ethnographic study.

Mr. Gordon Naylor, the founder of NCCI, was one of the key informants with whom I had corresponded for over twelve months. When the decision was made to do an ethnographic study at a Bahá'í-inspired school, Mr. Naylor kindly accepted my request to carry out the research at his school. Thus, NCCI became the chosen research setting.

NCCI asserts that:

... the solid foundation for education that they promote is achieving academic excellence through a curriculum that provides students with an optimal learning environment geared to helping them develop their full academic potential (NCCI school brochure, 1999).

Importantly for this study, NCCI strongly believes that school is a place where character can, and should, be developed. The school articulates a clear moral framework consisting of *19 Moral Capabilities* through which it asserts that students can achieve success in all aspects of human relations. These capabilities, as explained by the school, harmonise with the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As a Bahá'í-inspired school, NCCI has staff who are dedicated to the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and promote its ideals. The school advocates a philosophy which states that:

... [at] the heart of the educational experience at NCCI is our commitment to nurture and inspire qualities of the spirit. We believe that the spiritual life of our students is an important element of their overall development. At NCCI, we engage students in exploring and clarifying their own values appreciating that these values underlie their responses to both personal and social issues.

We stress the formation of a positive world view, respect for the beliefs of others, and the development of moral capabilities (NCCI school brochure, 1999).

To this end, NCCI espouses:

- the belief in the Oneness of Humanity
- working towards the elimination of prejudices of all kinds, whether racial, religious, gender-based, or social
- striving to uphold a high moral standard of honesty, trustworthiness, service to others, and deeds over words
- ensuring that men and women are treated equally
- using consultation to solve problems, and
- encouraging full participation in the life of the school.

The information package informs the reader about one of the notable axioms that NCCI uses, namely 'the differences that make a difference'. This concept is grounded in the school's espoused belief in the innate nobility of humanity, a concept derived from the Bahá'í writings which explain that, in essence, all human beings are born good/noble. Each individual has the capacity to show all the goodly attributes such as love, compassion, justice and peace. NCCI claims that the innate worth of all individuals is recognised within the school environment and their full potential is realised through mutual respect and cooperation.

Mr. Naylor, the founder of the school, states:

At NCCI, we hold up Unity in Diversity as watchwords for our school. Our students come from all over the world and we value all the experiences that they have to offer (NCCI school brochure, 1999).

Upon studying the Bahá'í writings, one becomes aware that they inspire this concept of Unity in Diversity in stating that:

The world of humanity is like unto a rose garden and the various races, tongues and people are like unto contrasting flowers. The diversity of colors in a rose-garden adds to the charm and beauty of the scene as variety enhances unity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1918, p. 183).

The Bahá'í writings also state that diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, 'as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord' (Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Shoghi Effendi, 1990, p. 32).

Another concept that is put forth by the school and is based on the Bahá'í writings is the concept of service to the world of humanity. Mr. Naylor asserts that:

*We are working to raise the standard of moral leadership by raising up students that will really be able to serve humanity. This service to humanity will enrich their own lives as well as the lives of others.*

The importance of 'service to mankind' is stressed in the Bahá'í writings as 'the paramount motive of all existence' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 279), and '[s]ervice to humanity is service to God' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 8)

The curriculum offered by NCCI comprises world citizenship courses, a student-teacher mentorship programme, science, design and technology, wildfire outdoor education facility for environmental studies, performing and visual arts, an accredited English as a second language programme, a personal transformation programme, service workshops, healthy community partnerships such as the Stratford Festival and the Royal Conservatory of Music, and extra-curricular activities. The school asserts that through this 'thoughtful and diverse curriculum the students are supported to develop positive attitudes and skills needed to be a world citizen' (NCCI school brochure, 1999). The school maintains that an effective student/teacher ratio, comprised of about 8 to 12 students in a class, also contributes

to the implementation of all their ideals. Twelve students per class is the maximum at NCCI.

The nineteen leadership capabilities adopted by NCCI as the moral standard which the entire body of staff and students strive to achieve ‘represent a real shift in mental framework in the individual’ (Mr. Naylor). Mr. Naylor explains that these capabilities are based on a model of service rather than a model of power, and that four major elements make up the moral capability standard – concepts, attitudes, virtues and skills. The students and staff go through workshop training at the beginning of the year to understand insightfully the *19 Moral Capabilities* and how to implement them throughout the year.

NCCI students come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. In 2000, at the time of this research, some of the countries the students represented included China, Kuwait, Arabia, Canada, Mexico and the United States of America (USA). There were approximately one hundred students, fifty percent of which were Bahá’ís. Both girls and boys were represented in the school contingent. The parents of a few Bahá’í students lived in Stratford and these parents were actively involved in the activities of the Bahá’í Faith, and fully supported the school’s activities. All students apparently wanted to be at NCCI, as each had to go through an interview process at the beginning of the year to justify why they wanted to study at that school. The school fees indicated that in general students would have come from affluent backgrounds, although some had won half or full scholarships. Around 90% of NCCI staff in 2000 were Bahá’ís, including the cleaners, dorm parents, kitchen staff and teachers.

The NCCI setting, which places significant importance on values education and

students' spiritual development, together with the goal of academic excellence, suggests that NCCI provided a fertile ground for research into the topic of wisdom education and the role of the school in its facilitation.

## **Research design**

Prior to pursuing the ethnographic research at NCCI and analysing the resulting data, a background study was undertaken of wisdom from a Bahá'í perspective, with the aim of gaining an understanding of wisdom education from a Bahá'í perspective and providing 'a Bahá'í wisdom conceptual framework' that would identify the precepts reinforcing the main research. This background study provided a conceptual framework within which to observe wisdom education in NCCI, and an understanding of the Bahá'í Faith and its central tenets. The Bahá'í writings on the role of education for the individual and society were explored, as were Bahá'í writings on wisdom.

The research design also involved a critical analysis of the concept of wisdom and its acquisition, as seen from three theoretical perspectives of wisdom, namely philosophy, psychology and Biblical studies. Once the collected data were analysed, they were correlated with these three perspectives.

## **Ethnography**

Ethnography can be defined as 'a way of collecting, describing, and analysing the ways in which human beings categorise the meaning of their world' (Aamodt, 1989, p. 30). The ethnographic method used in the interpretive approach of this thesis is concerned with social and cultural anthropology. In this context, the ethnographer spends a significant amount of time in the field searching, observing and interpreting

the signs of social interaction in the selected cultural setting, in this case the school. The social interactions between the participants, as well as between the researcher and the participants, form the basis for knowledge and understanding.

The cultural context is important in ethnography as it informs participants' understandings and perspectives of the setting's cultural systems. The ethnographer attempts to learn what knowledge participants use to interpret experience and how they behave in their cultural environment. In effect:

... ethnography is grounded in the culture concept and seeks to understand the native's (or human carrier's) view of a cultural system. The language of ethnographers includes, among other terms, cultural scenes, culturally relevant domains of meaning, researcher-informant experiences, and cultural themes (Aamodt, 1989, p. 32).

Thus, the researcher seeks to understand the values of the culture through understanding the participants' values. Through observation, interviewing and immersion in the participants' lives, the researcher looks for the significance of the participants' beliefs and the meanings they assign to their behaviour. Based on the above description of ethnography, the next section provides the rationale behind choosing ethnography as the methodology for this research.

Culture is often defined as 'ways of understanding that are judged to be characteristic of a discernible group' (Chambers, 2000, p. 852). In accordance with this definition, the setting of a secondary school system inspired by a religious context can be considered a specific cultural setting. To understand and study such a setting, ethnography is one of the most suitable methods of recreating the set of values, shared beliefs and practices of the group for the reader. It should be noted that, as Wolcott (1987, p. 43) points out, 'ethnography is not new-found respect for another



culture’, rather ‘the purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret cultural behaviour’.

The specific focus of this research is to explore ‘the role of the school in facilitating wisdom’. The concept of interpretive ethnography of an educational setting is an appropriate method for discerning this facilitation through descriptive and evaluative techniques. Moreover, as Yon (2003, p. 412, quoting Britzman, 1995), states:

...growing ethnographic research in education has to do with the attractiveness and promise of ethnography not only as a process and product that embody novelty and pleasurable reading but also as a method that claims to take the reader into the actual world of its subjects in order to reveal the cultural knowledge that is working in a particular place, as it is actually lived through its subjects.

### **Interpretive educational ethnography**

Educational ethnography has been used for evaluation, descriptive research and theoretical inquiry (Yates, 1987, p. 62). One of the important features of the interpretive ethnographic perspective in education is the re-examination and understanding of the existing categories and concepts that broaden one’s understanding and position in the process of education, and increase one’s facility for productive action (Yates, 1987, p. 62). Through the techniques of educational ethnography, the researcher is able to portray a vision that will expand the reader’s understanding about the process of education, thus paving the way for constructive and creative change.

The re-examination and understanding of the education process necessitates the ethnographer to ‘take a broad look at the behavior [she is] observing and to examine that behavior in its social context’ (Wolcott, 1987, p. 55). The ethnographer also has

the task of organising and presenting the collected information explicitly, ‘searching out the “shoulds” and “oughts,” the ideals and realities, the satisfactions, contradictions, and paradoxes’ (Wolcott, 1987, p. 55). Thus the unique contribution of ethnographers within the educational community lies in ‘helping educators better understand both the little traditions of schools and the big traditions of the larger society’ (Wolcott, 1987, p. 55).

Educational ethnography provides rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings. The data represent educational processes as they occur: processes that include the teaching and learning that occurs at schools, and the interaction and relationships between staff, students and parents. Goetz and Le Compte (1984a, pp. 31-32) summarise several functions of educational ethnography. Their research demonstrates that educational ethnography investigates the variety of forms education takes across cultures and among subgroups within society, the manifest and latent functions of educational structures and processes, and the conflicts generated when socialising agents are confronted by rapid social change. The lives of individual teachers, students, and administrators can be documented for unique and common patterns of experience, outlook and response.

Importantly, educational ethnography contributes to strengthening the overall research upon which many innovations and policies are based. Ethnographic accounts convey to teachers, administrators and parents the diversity to be expected from children, students, and school communities, and encourage these educators to respond to their charges more flexibly and appropriately (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984a, pp. 31-32).

## **The researcher's role in relation to the research**

I am an Australian citizen who was born in Iran and left the country for India due to the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In India I studied in a Bahá'í international school R-12, whose students represented 36 different countries. I arrived in Australia as a refugee in 1986 and was granted refugee status like many other Bahá'í because the Iranian Embassy in India would not renew my passport as a Bahá'í.

As a Bahá'í, my personal commitments and experience have influenced my research goal. I am attracted to 'wisdom education' as a key component in Bahá'í schools and share the same Bahá'í cultural background as most of the participants who were interviewed.

The research for this thesis is located in the Bahá'í cultural ideology, which stresses the importance of a holistic education where the child is nurtured both materially and spiritually. As Goetz and Le Compte (1984b, p. 42) state:

The predispositions scholars hold toward the formulation of research goals and questions and toward the theoretical orientations informing these objectives are influenced by multiple factors: personal life experiences, cultural ideologies, philosophical and ethical commitments, and the issues and problems identified by significant others in the lay or research communities.

Where the researcher belongs to the same culture as that of the participants, the advantage of using ethnography as a method becomes apparent as 'the ethnographic researcher begins by examining even very commonplace groups or processes in a fresh and different way' (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984a, p. 2), which in turn allows the investigation to discern both the detail and the generality of the situation.

My background of belonging to the Bahá'í Faith greatly assisted the process of the fieldwork. Due to my familiarity and understanding of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, an immediate bond was established between me and the staff of the school, the majority of whom were Bahá'ís. The positive relationship was also assisted by my communication with the founder of the school for about one year prior to the fieldwork. In addition, I am an educator, and this contributed toward an understanding of the school system at NCCI and the pedagogy of teaching.

Often, sharing the same background allows a trusting connectedness to be established between the researcher and the informant. The informants are then in a comfortable position and share information without hesitation. Morse (1989, p. 66) is also of the opinion that:

What informants think the interviewer will understand relates to their perception of his or her cultural background and personal attributes...Even if there is no language barrier, there are things an informant can express only to an interviewer of similar background.

In this research, my similar background paved the way for enhanced ethnographic understanding as I was able to:

... view [my] subjects as people, rather than people as [my] subjects: to recognise that people live fully contextualised lives in which one is a human being all the time, but a student, or teacher, or administrator only part of the time (Wolcott, 1987, p. 49).

In this context I was able to develop genuine relationships with the participants, leaving open the possibility for both the participants and myself to change in the process. I was always mindful not to impose my ideas on the participants.

In general, it could be stated that sharing the same background to that of the informants was an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

## **Research methods**

This section provides a description of the specific sources and techniques used for collecting data, their strengths and limitations, and how they were used in the research. The methods used were a) participant observation; b) the researcher's observations; c) interviews; and d) document/curriculum analysis.

### **Participant observation**

A characteristic theme in an interpretive approach is that 'humans act intentionally' (Wiseman, 1990, p. 103). In an interpretive approach, the researcher is interested in the study of humans. Thus, ethnographic research not only engenders descriptions of practices and events that surround the life of a group, it also provides an interpretation of the meaning of these in, and for the group's culture. In order to achieve this goal, 'ethnographic research requires the researcher to be immersed in the daily activity and social intercourse of a group' (Wiseman, 1990, p. 139). In this way ethnographers focus on what the world is like for people who have learned to live in a particular way.

Ethnography depends on the researcher's use of self where 'the most typical use of self is as a participant observer who gathers data through both informal interviewing and on-site participation' (Lipson, 1989, pp. 62-63). It is important to note that ethnographic researchers observe the interaction between themselves and the people they are observing. It is claimed that the 'best data grow out of relationships in which informants trust the researcher and in which the researcher has a grasp of his or her own influence on the interaction' (Lipson, 1989, p. 65). Therefore, the researchers

need to be aware of their own behaviour, and the influence of their own feelings and reactions on data gathering and analysis.

Informants make judgements on many levels about what is acceptable to tell the researchers. The researcher's background, personality, professional training and responses or reactions to situations all have an impact on the process of data collection.

As Lipson (1989, p. 68) states, 'Good ethnographers often have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, are able to maintain a kind of detached involvement, and are able to cope with culture shock'. Gulick (1970), quoted by Lipson (1989, p. 124), expressed the ethnographer's emotional and intellectual response by stating that fieldwork involves the same emotions as life at home, then to these are added the necessity of being continually alert, learning new routines and cues, and heightened awareness of one's personality, all of which can be emotionally draining. During participant observation, the aim is for the researcher to try and understand the view of the participants and 'to be in the setting long enough to acquire some notion of acceptance and understanding' (Lareau & Shultz, 1996, p. 3).

Participant observation, together with in-depth interviews with informants, is typical of ethnographic studies and is the primary technique used by ethnographers to gain access to data. The researcher needs to get to know the informants and to spend time with them in order to create a mutual bond of trust and friendship. He/she lives as much as possible with, and in the same manner as the subjects being investigated (Le Compte & Goetz, 1984, p. 41). The researcher then proceeds to collect information about the informants' day-to-day affairs. Hence, in participant-observation the person is the 'instrument' (Lareau & Shultz, 1996, p. 4).

### *Limitations of participant observation*

Although at first I considered teaching at NCCI, in retrospect I was glad that it did not eventuate, as quantitatively I would not have been able to gather the amount of data that has been collected, and qualitatively the data would probably not have had the rich content and the depth of insight that it has presently.

Woods (1986, pp. 38-39) makes the point that during ethnographic work, strong ties are made with the participants, which is a necessary requirement if one is to understand their ways of life. However, the danger is that the empathy that develops during a full participant observation may take over and the researcher who is in a position of authority may side with a particular group and interpret materials only through the views of that group. Although the same situation may arise during a non-participant observation technique, its occurrence is less likely.

The non-participant observation technique keeps the researcher from real involvement in a role, hence encouraging the cultivation of a detachment that is necessary for the 'fair and scientific appraisal of material discovered and presented' (Woods, 1986, p. 39).

It should be noted that although I was an observer who did not participate in any of the roles under observation and did not have any formal role within the school structure, I was nevertheless part of the scene and the community, and was involved in many ways in the life of the staff and students of the school, as mentioned previously. My involvement with the school was initially through my relationship with the Executive Director, which began by email about one year prior to my visit to the school. My interest in the field of education and the Bahá'í perspective were then shared with the staff through the Executive Director. The staff and students

identified me as someone interested in the field of education from a Bahá'í background who was particularly interested in their school system, which was based on Bahá'í principles. The level of mutual trust and expectation was apparent when I was warmly welcomed as a 'fellow human, who shared in the company of both teachers and pupils', and 'a substitute member of staff, available for use, possibly in times of emergency' (Woods, 1986, p. 40).

My immersion in everyday activities, during observation and taking field notes, enabled me to blend in with the scenery as much as possible. Most of the time, I was able to observe a class from a corner of a classroom. Sometimes, however, if I interacted with the class initially, brainstorming about the research topic, I blended with the class so that I was considered one of them as we explored a topic together. As Woods (1986, p. 40) states, '[t]he main requirements for observation, unsurprisingly, are a sharp eye, a keen ear and a sound memory'. However, to assist my memory, I also video-taped many situations such as residency life, the school assembly, dance workshops and informal school days where the students played various games facilitated by the staff.

I gave attention to the academic teaching by attending all types of classes, offered at least twice, covering years 7 to 12. The classes included English, maths, science, dance, music, dance/theatre workshops and computing. I was able to converse with all members of the staff, including administrative and kitchen staff. I also attended many extra-curricular activities such as the dance workshops, community gatherings and music workshops.

It was apparent that I needed to observe across a range of situations before I could analyse the data. In order to remember these observations, I either took field notes,



video-recorded the events or tape-recorded the conversations/interviews/talks.

During my observations, after assessing the situation, I would openly take notes. This would occur during class sessions, behaviour management sessions, in the corridor, in the office provided to me (which was Mr. Naylor's previous office) or in other parts of the school. There were times when, although I carried a note book, taking notes was not possible, for example during school assembly, walking to and from the theatre and during the event, during consultation with the students in a class, as a group, regarding the topic of my research or during many extra-curricular activities.

### **Researcher's observations**

My observations of the participants were integrated with my participation in the day-to-day life of the school. Some instances where I was solely an observer were during the staff meetings, student behaviour management consultations, academic and dance workshop classes, and accompanying staff and students to the local theatre to watch artistic plays on eight occasions.

During the daily activities of the school I formed relationships and became part of the community. For example, I shared the same residence with the students so I had the opportunity to participate in the devotional meetings in the evenings. On one occasion, when one of the students was ill, I was called upon to take the student to the hospital adjoining the dormitories.

I ate daily with the students and staff in the school cafeteria. During the week-ends I ate with the students at the dormitory or house residence. Later, I was asked to change residence along with the senior students who were going to occupy the Executive Director's former house. In that residence, I cooked for the senior students during some holidays. I went on an excursion with the students and staff to Toronto

to view the school's dance workshop performance, and attended extra-curricular activities such as the Nineteen Day Feasts<sup>1</sup>, public talks given by the school staff and others sharing the Bahá'í perspective on various issues, and administrative meetings. I attended all the morning assemblies and sometimes was asked to say a prayer. During all of the above activities I was able to observe the participants and either note or video the events.

During school public holidays I was able to attend functions of interest along with some Bahá'í staff of the school who were actively involved with Bahá'í activities. I accompanied Mr. Naylor to public talks on two occasions, once within Stratford and once to Toronto where he had been requested to address a very large gathering about the role of arts from the Bahá'í perspective.

I also attended a public talk arranged by the Bahá'í society university students in the city of Hamilton and another administrative meeting in Toronto. One of the school staff also kindly took me to London to see a performance organised by the London Bahá'í children's classes.

In the above situations my role as a researcher was only to observe situations of interest. I was not part of the proceedings. In keeping with Woods' (1986, p. 36) definition, I adopted the 'fly on the wall' technique to observe things as they happened naturally, as undisturbed as possible by my presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Nineteen Day Feasts are occasions where the Baha'is of a community gather together every Baha'i month (the Baha'i calendar consists of 19 months of 19 days each) to meet each other. The Nineteen Day Feasts consist of three sections: the spiritual section where the sacred scriptures are shared in an atmosphere of joy and reverence; the administrative section where the affairs of the community are reported and consulted upon; and the social section during which the Baha'is are able to catch up with each other socially over refreshments. Each section is as important as the other.

I preferred the non-participant mode of research as it allowed me enough time to deal with the data and be present at all the relevant occasions as an observer. Woods (1986, pp. 36-37) explains the advantages of a non-participant observation approach in ethnography, stating that:

... ethnography is a complicated research approach, making great demands on the researcher's energies and time, and frequently presents a great mass of confusing and intricate data which the researcher has to understand. Whatever advantages participating brings, it adds to those demands. In the first place, it takes up valuable *time*. Secondly, it adds to one's responsibilities. One must meet the requirements of the role, and must meet them regularly, on the prescribed terms and at stipulated times. Thirdly, it increases the possibilities of role conflict. Objectives as teacher and as researcher may occasionally clash.

## **Interviews**

The quantitative goal, as McCracken (1988, p.16) describes it, is to isolate and define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken, and then to determine, again with great precision, the relationship between them.

The qualitative goal is to isolate and define categories during the research process, and to expect the nature and definition of analytic categories to change in the course of a project. Qualitative research normally looks for patterns of interrelationship between many categories. It is in this light that the questions put to the informants require much more flexible and broader techniques than those of the precise, unambiguous and closed questions of the quantitative method.

Interviewing is one of the common ways of collecting data for a qualitative study. It complements other processes of data collection such as questionnaires, observation and case study fieldwork. Yin (1994, p. 84) points out that '[o]ne of the most

important sources of case study information is the interview', as it provides an environment in which the researcher seeks information regarding how people interpret the world around them.

Interviews in different forms of person-to-person or group processes 'can be defined as a conversation' (Merriam, 1998, p. 71). Lofland and Lofland (1984, p. 12) also refer to 'intensive interviewing' or 'unstructured interviewing' as a 'guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis'. Interviewing, thus conceived, is an interactive process whereby it 'provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. In this respect, interviews are special forms of conversation' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 113).

Dexter (1970, p. 136, cited in Merriam, 1998, pp. 71-72) argues that such conversations need to 'have a purpose', and that 'interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when...it will get better data or more data or data at less cost than other tactics!'

There are several types of interviewing, largely distinguished by the amount of structure desired. Highly structured/standardised interviews are those where the wording of questions and their order are predetermined, or where an oral form of survey takes place. Semi-structured interviews contain a mix of structured questions as well as the freedom to insert further unplanned questions to explore issues that arise. Finally, unstructured/informal interviews have flexible, exploratory, open-ended questions that are carried out more like a conversation. 'The key to getting good data from interviewing is to ask good questions' (Merriam, 1998, pp. 73, 75-76). Merriam (1998, pp. 73, 75-76, quoting Patton, 1990, p. 312), states that:

Using words that make sense to the interviewee, words that reflect the respondent's world view, will improve the quality of data obtained during the interview. Without sensitivity to the impact of particular words on the person being interviewed, the answer may make no sense at all-or there may be no answer.

The guided interview strategy allows researchers to collect the data needed without impinging on people's privacy or demanding a lot of time from them. In this type of interview, the researchers, by drawing on their understanding of how they themselves see and experience the world, can supplement and interpret the data they generate in the long interview. The researcher collects data that are both abundant and manageable, taking care to observe the respondent's rights (formal and informal). In other words, 'the investigator serves as a kind of "instrument" in the collection and analysis of data' (McCracken, 1988, pp. 18, 12).

#### *Limitations of interviewing*

Although it is the belief that the collection of verbal data is a widely accepted way of gathering information 'about past behaviour and experiences, private actions and motives, and beliefs, values and attitudes' (Foddy, 1993, p.1), there is also evidence 'to support the conclusion that the verbal data we collect are very often of dubious validity and reliability' (Foddy, 1993, p. 11).

Foddy provides a series of examples that illustrate the inadequacy of many of the questions that have been used in social research in the past. He suggests there is a great deal of scope for improving the quality of the data we collect for social research, giving the example of factual questions such as whether or not respondents have registered and voted in various elections, or possessed library cards and driving

licences, which sometimes elicit invalid answers. In this instance he raises the question that:

... if questions concerning such simple and apparently objective matters as 'age' elicit inaccurate data, one must wonder about the validity problems that might be associated with more threatening, more complex, or less well known issues (Foddy, 1993, p. 3).

Foddy (1993, pp. 2-11) gives other examples, such as the relationship between what respondents say they do and what they actually not always being very strong, or that respondents' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, habits or interests often seeming to be extraordinarily unstable. He maintains that small changes in wording can sometimes produce major changes in the distribution of responses, and that there are times when respondents commonly misinterpret questions. Sometimes answers to earlier questions can affect respondents' answers to later questions, highlighting the need for improvement of the techniques used for collecting verbal data.

In the various forms of interviews conducted in the research for this thesis, the researcher took into account the limitations and potential inadequacy of the questions posed.

### **Key informants**

Interviews ranging from 15 minutes to 2 hours were conducted at the school with:

- The founder
- The principal and the vice-principal
- All the staff members of the school
- Representatives of the student body
- Some former staff and students.

Mr. Naylor, the founder of NCCI, was interviewed on several occasions to enable the researcher to grasp the full extent of the school's vision. The conversations with both

the founder and the principal were designed to gauge the values and beliefs of the school philosophy, and the characteristics and behaviours expected from the staff and students. The researcher considered the roles of the principal and the founder as crucial in the school's development. Hence, I was interested in investigating the role of the school's founder, as well as the principal as leaders of the school. Their passion for the goals of the school, their belief in serving rather than managing, their attitude towards learning, and their characteristics and behaviour would not only illuminate the school philosophy but also elaborate how they envisioned wisdom to be facilitated in a Bahá'í-inspired school.

Blumberg and Greenfield (1986, p. 4), through their book *The Effective Principal*, illustrate eight, in-depth studies of successful principals using different but equally effective problem-solving leadership techniques to point out that the role of the principal is central to what the school is all about and 'that the character of a school's culture is largely influenced by its principal'. As Blumberg and Greenfield (1986, p. 8) assert, the role of principal 'involves most centrally the bringing of one's intellectual and emotional history in contact with a desire to create qualitatively better education for youngsters--and having the skills to do that'.

The school's ethos meant the 'staff' of NCCI included the kitchen staff, the cleaning staff, the administrative staff, the principal and the founder. The decision to include all staff, not just teaching staff, was based on the school's philosophy of promoting the concept of Unity in Diversity, where the views and actions of all members of an institution are valuable and respected.

The students were randomly selected from the different grade levels, taking gender balance into consideration. As stated earlier in describing the school's student

population, they came from different cultural backgrounds, as many were from overseas countries such as the USA, China, Arabia, Japan and Kuwait. As well as these students who lived in the school's residential area, there were day scholars from Stratford.

A total of 54 interviews were conducted. The questions focused on the informants' perceptions of what wisdom is, how it is acquired by children, and the nature of the staff's role as educators in facilitating the acquisition of wisdom by children.

Through the medium of interviews, specific details about curriculum content and processes used by the school in seeking to enhance wisdom in children were collected. The way NCCI seeks to measure the effectiveness of what they do was discussed and information relevant to this research study was gathered.

### **Document/curriculum analysis**

Ross (1993) and Mann (1978) use the term 'curriculum criticism' to describe the process of curriculum analysis. Curriculum criticism combines and adapts collected information in order to help others perceive and understand educational phenomena more fully. Curriculum criticism has its roots in two qualitative areas of inquiry: one being aesthetic criticism, which views curriculum as a literary object; the other being social anthropology, which is based on extensive observation, interviewing and the collection of educational artefacts (Ross, 1993). This research has conducted the document/curriculum inquiry based on observation, interviewing and printed educational materials.

Mann's (1978, p. 80) essay on curriculum criticism has been very influential in defining 'curriculum criticism' and is worth summarising in this context. Mann asserts that curriculum criticism combines elements of aesthetics and science, and



that what the researcher selects for study is a matter of one's personal knowledge about its value and fruitfulness. He regards this personal knowledge 'as a valuable guide to the processes of the curriculum critique, including the initial process of selecting a focus of attention' (Mann, 1978, p. 80). One may notice a parallel between this concept and the way in which Merriam (1998, p. 45) refers to theoretical knowledge. She maintains that 'it would be difficult to imagine a study without a theoretical....conceptual framework' and quotes Becker (1993, cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 45), who points out that '[w]e couldn't work at all if we didn't have at least an implicit theory of knowledge; we wouldn't know what to do first'. Mann (1978) maintains that the personal knowledge in which the curriculum critique is grounded is principally knowledge about ethical reality. Therefore, one may approach the phenomena to be examined not with the 'open mind of the scientist' but with a set of predispositions. However, he is quick to point out that this model does not mean that:

...the *content* of what one will be disclosed in a critique is fixed in advance by prior personal knowledge...The ethics-based models do not determine what meanings will be disclosed in a curriculum but they suggest the ethical dimensions which, if found in a design, will incline one to regard such a design as worth examining (Mann, 1978, p. 80).

Thus, Mann believes that the form and content of the critic's personal knowledge direct the critic's attention to those designs that may be expected to have meaning within the context of the critic's ethical knowledge. In this condition, the possibility of the critic/researcher discovering new meanings in educational situations is enhanced. It should be noted, however, that he does not believe in the dichotomy of science and art and their corresponding objectivity and subjectivity. Mann (1978) argues that artists and scientists have recognised that the objective-science,

subjective-art schema is wrong, and that there are many similarities between the two processes. Mann (1978, p. 79) quotes Albert Einstein, who said that ‘at the heart of theoretical physics was the free play of the imagination’, and classical poets who have asserted ‘that the foundation of art is the objective imitation of nature’.

With the above in mind, one can say that curriculum/document analysis or criticism in general is a qualitative inquiry that focuses on context, meaning and the explanation of phenomena. Hence, curriculum critics logically draw on the disciplined methods of observation and interpretation that are associated with fieldwork in social anthropology.

The data found in these documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. It can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, offer historical understanding and track change development. One of the greatest advantages in using documentary material is its stability, since the presence of the observer does not alter what is being studied (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

Documentary data are particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated.

Curriculum analysis, like interviews, questionnaires and observations, has both strengths and limitations. The school curricula and complementary materials are not produced for research, therefore they may not fit the conceptual framework of the research. However, this in itself can be an advantage rather than a limitation, since the documented materials are non-reactive or unaffected by the research process.

### *Documents*

The most important NCCI document analysed in this thesis is the document outlining

the set of *19 Moral Capabilities* – the principles the school observes religiously. At my request, the school’s founder explained this document in some detail, giving historical background on the school’s philosophy and practical examples of facilitation of wisdom by staff. Several papers written by principals of Bahá’í schools, including NCCI, and the Bahá’í writings, specifically on wisdom education, which form the basis of all Bahá’í and Bahá’í-inspired curriculum, have thrown light on the subject.

Some of the other documents analysed were the school brochure, the school’s philosophy, and information about and an overview of subjects taught at citizenship classes. These documents were analysed informally before and during the interviewing process and the class observations in order to gain a deeper understanding of the school’s philosophy and highlight issues for consultation. Formal analysis of these documents accompanied the analysis of the interviews after formulating a conceptual framework, which will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Examination of wisdom in three classic disciplines and from a Bahá’í perspective**

#### *a) The essentials of the Bahá’í Faith*

In order to provide a conceptual foundation for the analysis of the data, the research investigated and analysed the philosophy of the Bahá’í Faith. The necessity for, and purpose of religion from a Bahá’í perspective was explicated. The examination of the three fundamental teachings of the Bahá’í Faith – Oneness of God, Oneness of Religion and Oneness of Humanity – provided a basis for understanding the Bahá’í perspective on education and wisdom. These findings provided a conceptual

background for the analysis and categorisation of the concepts about wisdom and education that were identified and extracted from the research data.

*b) Wisdom and education in the Bahá'í perspective*

Before proceeding to analyse and interpret the data, a Bahá'í wisdom conceptual framework was created in order to provide a basis to observe and critically analyse the practice of wisdom education in NCCI. The school's religious background and its allegiance to the Bahá'í Faith set the scene for the inquiry into the Bahá'í perspective of education and the concept of wisdom.

The Bahá'í perspective of education and specific Bahá'í writings on wisdom were analysed systematically in order to provide a conceptual framework that identifies the theoretical concepts, principles and philosophical assumptions underpinning the study. This conceptual framework provided a philosophical context for both the observation and interview processes at the school, and the subsequent analysis of the research data obtained from these sources.

Clare and Hamilton (2003), in their work on transforming research data into text, suggest that researchers use a 'critical friend' to help them formulate concepts and clarify their findings. Thus, the conceptual framework in this research was developed through a dialectical conversation with a critical friend, Norman Habel, who is an expert in 'wisdom literature', in particular Biblical wisdom literature (Habel, 1972). The process of interrogation and challenge formulated an alternative 'world view' to that of the researcher. The formulation and shaping of the initial concepts underwent incremental development before they were proposed as the conceptual framework. As pointed out by Clare and Hamilton (2003, p. 201) in their guide for writing

research, ‘critical feedback from a trusted colleague, given without bias or prejudice, is a valuable, even essential, resource for researchers’.

### *c) Wisdom in three classic disciplines*

The background research also included a detailed examination of theoretical concepts of wisdom found in three classic disciplines. Representative figures and texts from the disciplines of philosophy (Socrates: see for example Robinson, 1990; Calef, 1996), psychology (Sternberg: see for example Sternberg, 1990, 2001, 2002) and Biblical studies (*Proverbs*: see for example Whybray, 1965; Habel 1972) were selected to provide an insight into the classic perspective on wisdom. The focus of exploration of the three perspectives was the definition of wisdom and its acquisition. The wisdom concepts associated with these three sources outside of the Bahá’í Faith provided a framework to ensure relative continuity between the findings associated with a Bahá’í school and the wider conceptual world.

### **Organisation of the data for detailed analysis**

The first step in the process of data analysis and interpretation was to organise the data. The 54 audio interviews were transcribed word by word. I, the researcher, transcribed most of the interviews, including the interviews with the founder commenting on the *19 Moral Capabilities*. The transcription of the data allowed me an excellent opportunity to become familiar with it.

My observation notes were typed in chronological order. The notes narrated my participation observation on the day-to-day activities of the school and my reflections on my observation with regard to the concept and practice of wisdom education at NCCI.

I then extracted a summary of the staff and student responses to the two interview questions: a) ‘what is wisdom?’; and b) ‘what are the components of wisdom?’.

The next step was to narrate my experience at NCCI, from the observation notes, correlating the observation with the Bahá’í writings. In particular, I highlighted instances where the staff had modelled wisdom in action as teachers and as human beings.

The collected documents were perused in order to understand the philosophy of the school, and the documents’ correlation to the concept and practice of wisdom education at NCCI.

## **Analysis of research data**

### **1. First step in analysis of the data in terms of the first two main categories of investigation of the Bahá’í school**

#### **Category 1. The concept of wisdom in education (Appendix One, Tables 1 & 2)**

The collected data were then analysed in order to formulate sub-categories about the essential nature of wisdom, based on responses to the following questions:

- 1) What is wisdom?
- 2) What are the components of wisdom?

The formulation of the sub-categories was an evolving process that required multiple perusals of the data in order to capture not only the qualitative essence of the ideas expressed, but also to cover all the ideas articulated.

As a result of this process, two sets of sub-categories emerged that corresponded to the first two research questions. These sub-categories are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven (see also Appendix One, Tables 1 & 2).

## **Category 2. Acquisition of wisdom through education (Appendix Two, Tables 1 & 2)**

The data were analysed and classified again to discover the participants' views of how wisdom is acquired in theory as well as how a Bahá'í-inspired school translates this issue in practical terms. The findings were interpreted and synthesised into more precise categories derived from the data. Similar to the previous steps, the collected data were perused repeatedly to formulate emerging concepts that arose in response to the next three interview questions:

- 1) Can children/youth acquire wisdom?
- 2) What role schools have in creating an environment where wisdom can be developed/acquired?
- 3) How does NCCI, in particular, facilitate the acquisition of wisdom?

Once again, the formulation of the concepts was an evolving process that required perusing the data several times in order to capture not only the qualitative essence of the ideas expressed but also to cover all the ideas articulated.

As a result of this formulation of the concepts, two sets of sub-categories emerged that corresponded to the three interview questions noted above. These sub-categories were designed to clarify, in broad terms, the diverse ways of acquiring wisdom from the participants' perspectives.

The first set of sub-categories emerged in response to the two research questions 'can children/youth acquire wisdom?' and 'what role do schools have in creating an environment where wisdom can be developed/acquired?'. This set of sub-categories denotes the acquisition of wisdom in *theory* (Appendix Two, Table 1).

## **2. Second step in the research process through further analysis of data and findings in categories one and two**

- a) re-read the relevant data in the light of the first set of sub-categories and the conceptual framework of the Bahá'í Faith
- b) analyse and reflect on the core features and relationship between these several sub-categories
- c) enable a coherent understanding of the elements of wisdom in Bahá'í education to emerge and to express these elements in a more precise formulation.

The result of this process was the emergence of a distinctive understanding of wisdom in Bahá'í education that has been designated the '*wisdom process*', consisting of five stages, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

A further check of these findings was made by re-reading the participants' responses to the first two research questions to ascertain whether the stages of the '*wisdom process*' were in fact evident and explicit in the participants' responses.

### *Correlation of the 'wisdom process' with the three classic disciplines*

The '*wisdom process*' was then correlated with the perspectives of the three classic disciplines, consisting of the representative voices of Socrates for philosophy, Sternberg for psychology and *Proverbs* for Biblical studies, to ascertain the relative continuity between these findings and the '*wisdom process*'.

## **3. Third step: re-reading the data and findings of categories one and two, in light of the '*wisdom process*', to clarify the practices involved in the acquisition of wisdom in the chosen school**

The final step in the research process was to:

- a) re-read the relevant data and findings describing the second set of sub-categories relating to the acquisition of wisdom in practice
- b) ascertain whether these sub-categories were consistent with the '*wisdom process*' formulation developed earlier
- c) determine the most appropriate sub-categories for discerning the way in which the



*'wisdom process'* was evident in practice at the Bahá'í school in question.

The second set of sub-categories, denoting the acquisition of wisdom in *practice* (Appendix Two, Table 2), emerged in response to the research question 'how does NCCI in particular facilitate the acquisition of wisdom?'. The sub-categories were expanded using the participants' interview data to clearly demonstrate the leadership group, staff and student views about how the school facilitated the acquisition of wisdom. This is discussed in Chapter Eight.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this research was that the time available for the data gathering process was limited to six weeks, meaning that I was not able to observe the students' development over time. If the same data collection process had been carried out once at the beginning of the year and once at the end, the research outcome may have been sharper. However, to some extent this limitation was managed by interviewing some former staff and students of NCCI. Their responses to the interview questions indicated the influence of NCCI on their material and spiritual development through facilitating wisdom education.

Another limitation may have been that I was an 'insider' who belongs to the Bahá'í Faith. Some arguments have been presented against insider research, which state that such research is inherently biased (Aguilar, 1981). However, while Field (1989, p. 80) notes that there is evidence of bias in relation to selection of data and formulation of conclusions, she states that the examples are few. Also, there does not seem to be any evidence of deliberate dishonesty. Moreover, sharing the same background does not necessarily make one a native, as 'the linguistic variables that carry social information are network specific' (Aamodt, 1981, cited in Field, 1989, p. 80).

Referring to Aamodt's view, Field (1989, p. 80) asserts that the risk of such bias occurs in all research, and adds that:

Aguilar (1981) and Aamodt (1981) agree that ethnic insiders are generally not as much inside the cultural settings they study (as outsiders have implied) and that because society is formed of many sub-groups, with each geographically isolated group differing culturally from its neighbor, no researcher is likely to be a complete native of the group under study.

Having described the research methods, it is now time to explore the philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith – the fundamental teachings – to ensure the reader has an understanding of the Faith on which Bahá'í-inspired schools are based.

## Chapter Three: Philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith

This chapter focuses on the philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith, highlighting the need for education to cater not only for the material aspect, but also the individuals' spiritual dimension. The necessity and purpose of religion from a Bahá'í perspective is explored. The examination of the three fundamental teachings of the Bahá'í Faith – Oneness of God, Oneness of Religion and Oneness of Humanity – throws light on the concept of wisdom education from a Bahá'í perspective. These three fundamental principles will generate an understanding of the impact and interconnectedness of spiritual development and material growth.

### Introduction

The mission of the prophets, the revelation of the holy books, the manifestation of the heavenly teachers and the purpose of divine philosophy all center in the training of the human realities so that they may become clear and pure as mirrors and reflect the light and love of the Sun of Reality ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 262).

From a Bahá'í perspective, the great question relevant to humanity is that of religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 329) asserts that humanity has to use its faculty of inner spiritual powers to perceive that 'religion has been intended by God to be the means of grace, the source of life and cause of agreement'. In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 329) continues by writing that if religion 'becomes the cause of discord, enmity and hatred, it is better that man should be without it'.

The Bahá'í writings are replete with the elucidation of the purpose of religion. Religion is considered as the foundation of spiritual union, creating amity and

justice, and establishing world peace. The purpose of religion is the spiritual development of humanity and the acquisition of praiseworthy virtues to change one's thoughts and actions for the betterment of the world, to become nearer to God.

Bahá'u'lláh (1990, p. 215), the prophet founder of the Bahá'í Faith, writes:

The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1918, p.160) asserts that through the practical realisation of religion:

... the minds and souls will receive development by divine instruction; they will become assisted to investigate reality, attain to a lofty station of wisdom and establish the basis of a divine civilisation.

For individuals to be able to 'spiritually perceive' matters, they need to be conscious that they have two aspects to their nature. 'Man has two powers, and his development two aspects' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 60). These two powers are material and spiritual, and are likened to two wings. For the bird to be able to fly smoothly, it needs both wings to be strong. Therefore, if humanity is to advance toward the nobility of its station, it needs to nurture the development of the spiritual nature within individuals, which is lagging behind. The true progress of humanity from a Bahá'í perspective is for individuals to 'mirror forth' the attributes of God that are latent within their souls.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 326) states that 'human advancement has been greatest in the development of material virtues', and that civilisation is the sign and evidence of this progression. However, material advancement only utilises individuals' outward powers or virtues, whereas human beings also have inner or ideal virtues. 'Abdu'l-

Bahá (1982, p. 326) gives examples of both physical and ideal virtues present in human beings:

The sense of sight in man is a physical virtue; but insight, the power of inner perception, is ideal in its nature. The sense of hearing is a physical endowment, whereas memory in man is ideal...power of ideation, or faculty of intellection, is material, but the power of love is spiritual.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982, p. 327) explains that:

Philosophy is of two kinds: natural and divine. Natural philosophy seeks knowledge of physical verities and explains material phenomena, whereas divine philosophy deals with ideal verities and phenomena of the spirit.

What needs to happen in the world of humanity is that:

... the spirit of man must be strengthened; and just as his outer perceptions have been quickened, his inner intellectual powers must be sensitised so that he need not rely wholly upon tradition and human precedent (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 327).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982, p. 328) explains that in order for divine questions to be answered it is necessary for human beings to exercise reason and to logically examine the facts presented to them. To rely entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience will not reveal to human beings the inner reality of things. The reason for the survival of the teachings and principles of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others is that they are devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982, p. 328) further exhorts human beings to be committed to both lines of research and investigation so that through both the outer and inner powers of humanity, human beings can sincerely and intelligently investigate the foundation of religion,

recognise God as the Creator and Protector of humanity, and acknowledge the oneness of the world of humanity.

The underlying theology that informs my view of the Bahá'í Faith is summarised in the three fundamental teachings described in the next section.

## **Fundamental teachings of the Bahá'í Faith**

### **1. The Oneness of God**

The principle of the Oneness of God indicates that the universe and all that is within it has been created by one God. God has absolute control and knowledge over His creation. Human beings may call God by different names, such as Allah, Khoda or Yahweh, but the Bahá'ís understand that we are speaking about the same unique Being.

Human beings can never comprehend the essential reality of God. The Bahá'í writings state that there are differences in degree in the world of creation. There is the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom and the world of humanity. The differences in degree make it impossible for the lower kingdom to comprehend the higher kingdom. For example, a vegetable, no matter how developed it may be, will never understand an animal such as a dog. In the same manner, an animal – a dog, no matter how intelligent – will never understand the essence of the being of its owner, who is a human being.

A human being is finite while God is infinite. As human beings are finite and therefore cannot understand the essence of God, the Manifestations of God such as Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, The Bab and Bahá'u'lláh are needed to act as intermediaries between God and humanity. The Manifestations of God possess

different kinds of capacities that ordinary human beings lack. Hence they are not simply greater thinkers or philosophers, rather they are superior to those who do not possess similar capacities. According to the Bahá'í writings, human beings have two natures: the physical, lower nature, composed of elements, which decomposes after one's death; and the spiritual, higher nature, which is immortal. The Manifestations of God have a third nature that is unique to their station – the capacity to receive Divine Revelation and transmit it to humanity.

These Manifestations of God are like polished mirrors that have the capacity to reflect the Sun – God. The Sun (God) does not enter into the mirror but its effulgence is revealed in the pure mirror. The mirrors themselves are earthly and many, while the Sun is heavenly and one.

Bahá'u'lláh (1987, pp. 328-329), in many writings and prayers, describes God as the inaccessible, unknowable and omnipotent One:

Exalted, immeasurably exalted art Thou, O my Beloved, above the strivings of any of Thy creatures, however learned, to know Thee; exalted, immensely exalted art Thou above every human attempt, no matter how searching, to describe Thee! For the highest thought of men, however deep their contemplation, can never hope to outsoar the limitations imposed upon Thy creation, nor ascend beyond the state of the contingent world, nor break the bounds irrevocably set for it by Thee. How can, then, a thing that hath been created by Thy will that overruleth the whole of creation, a thing that is itself a part of the contingent world, have the power to soar into the holy atmosphere of Thy knowledge, or reach unto the seat of Thy transcendent power?

Therefore, as the Bahá'í writings explain, the Oneness of God refers to the essential being of God, which is one but is manifested through many prophets.

In summary, the fundamental teaching of the Oneness of God refers to the one God, the unknowable essence, the infinite being who is the creator of the world and all that exists within it. It also puts forth the belief that Oneness of God refers to the essential being of God, which is one but is manifested through many prophets which through their unique capacity, can receive Divine Revelation and transmit it to humanity.

## **2. The Oneness of Religion**

This basic Bahá'í principle expresses the fundamental unity of religion. It explains that from time to time in the history of humanity God sends Manifestations of God, who are principally the founders of the major revealed religions, to assist humanity in its collective evolution. These Manifestations of God are the educators of humanity who, through their teachings and laws, establish social systems according to human beings' level of maturity at the time.

The principle of progressive revelation is explained through the principle of unity of religion, which means that all the founders of the religions have come from God and all the teachings which they have brought are part of a single divine plan directed by God. There is only one religion of God, which is continually evolving, and each religious system represents a stage in the evolution of the whole. This is called 'progressive revelation', explained as follows by Bahá'u'lláh (1990, p. 74):

Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Bab. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely fore-ordained.



According to the principle of progressive revelation, Bahá'ís believe that when humanity reaches the next level of growth, God will send another Manifestation to educate and guide humanity, as the Universal House of Justice (1986, p. 517) writes:

Although the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is accepted as the Word of God and His Law as the Law of God, it is understood from the outset that Revelation is progressive, and that the Law, although the Will of God for this Age, will undoubtedly be changed by the next Manifestation of God.

In many of his writings, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims the existence of one God, and describes His attributes and His true nature. Bahá'u'lláh explains that, since human beings can never know the essence of God, through His profound bounty and grace God has sent His Messengers to manifest all His attributes. Therefore, to know the Messengers or Prophets of God is to know God and to obey them is to obey God. The nearest that a human being can get to God is to recognise His Manifestations.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, all the Manifestations of God are absolutely equal – no one of them is superior to the other. The differences that exist between the Teachings of these Manifestations of God are not due to any differences in their level of importance, but only according to the requirements and capacities of humanity during which they appear:

These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988b, p. 13).

In another passage, Bahá'u'lláh (1990, p. 59) declares:

Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá alludes to the fact that if we look at the history of humanity we perceive that the Prophets of God have praised and admired each other to the greatest extent. In keeping with this, He advises the Prophets’ followers to show love and kindness to one another:

...The Prophets have extolled each other to the utmost. Muhammad declared Christ to be the Spirit of God. This is an explicit text of the Qur’án. He declared Christ to be the Word of God. He eulogised the disciples of Christ to the utmost. He bestowed upon Mary, the mother of Christ, the highest praise. Likewise, Christ extolled Moses. He spread broadcast the Old Testament, the Torah, and caused the name of Moses to reach unto the East and the West. The purpose is this: that the Prophets Themselves have manifested the utmost love toward each other, but the nations who believe and follow Them are hostile and antagonistic among themselves (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 347).

In summary, the fundamental teaching of the Oneness of Religion expresses the basic unity of religion through the concept of progressive revelation. From time to time, according to the level of maturity of human beings, God sends a messenger to educate humanity through the messenger’s spiritual and social teachings. These teachings, or revelations, are part of a single divine plan directed by God. Hence, there is only one religion which is continually evolving.

Since human beings can never know the essence of God, the Manifestations of God are needed as intermediaries. To recognise them is to have recognised God, and to obey them is to have obeyed God. The stations of all the Manifestations of God are equal, and any differences that exist in their social laws are due to the exigencies and the capacity of humanity during which they appear.

### **3. The Oneness of Humanity**

The principle of the Oneness of Humanity refers to the declaration that the entire human race is one unified species. It implies that everyone has the same basic God-given capacities which are, in essence, noble. The physical appearance of a human being does not make one ethnic group superior to another.

The recognition and understanding of the Oneness of Humanity will cause the eradication of all types of prejudices, such as class, creed, ethnicity, sex, colour and nationality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1945, p. 50) counsels us to ‘consider the virtues of the human world and realise that the Oneness of Humanity is the primary foundation of them all’. He explains that the concept of the Oneness of Humanity is of paramount importance in the world’s religious and political condition. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982, p. 229) states:

Humanity shares in common the intellectual and spiritual faculties of a created endowment. All are equally subject to the various exigencies of human life and are similarly occupied in acquiring the means of earthly subsistence. From the viewpoint of creation human beings stand upon the same footing in every respect, subject to the same requirements and seeking the enjoyment and comfort of earthly conditions. Therefore, the things humanity shares in common are numerous and manifest. This equal participation in the physical, intellectual and spiritual problems of human existence is a valid basis for the unification of mankind.

The vision of the concept of the oneness of the world of humanity is explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá through the example of the Sun (God) and the mirror of the hearts. If all the mirrors were polished and could therefore reflect the fullness of the Sun, the ‘human body-politic’ would reach a state of absolute unity, thereby making it possible for the Sun to make its ‘fullest light and heat manifest’. He further explains that the duty of the human beings is to educate souls so that the Sun can be reflected

in them. If this goal is to be achieved, human beings have to set aside man-made distinctions among the individual members of the human family and express love towards one another to enable the power of unity to become stronger. The stronger the power of unity, the greater will be the reflection and revelation of God. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1976, pp. 218-219) states:

....Until love takes possession of the heart no other divine bounty can be revealed in it. All the prophets have striven to make love manifest in the hearts of men. His Holiness Jesus Christ sought to create this love in the hearts. He suffered all difficulties and ordeals that perchance the human heart might become the fountain-source of love.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that all the Manifestations of God have proclaimed the Oneness of God and the unity of humanity. Through them the Oneness of Humanity becomes visible. They have all taught that all human beings should love one another and help each other in one another’s development. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1978, p. 278) states that the Manifestations of God endured:

... unnumbered ills and tribulations, that a community from amongst mankind’s divergent peoples could gather within the shadow of the Word of God and live as one, and could, with delight and grace, demonstrate on earth the unity of humankind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982, p. 4) gives the example of His Holiness Jesus Christ, who ‘gave His life upon the cross for the unity of mankind’, and talks about other Prophets, such as Moses, who:

... was persecuted and driven out into the desert, Abraham was banished, Muhammad took refuge in caves, the Báb was killed and Bahá’u’lláh was exiled and imprisoned forty years. Yet all of Them desired fellowship and love among men. They endured hardships, suffered persecution and death for our sakes that we might be taught to love one another and be united and

affiliated instead of discordant and at variance... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 235).

'Abdu'l-Bahá also states that the unity of humanity, which is based on the principle of the Oneness of Humanity, is the most important accomplishment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The unity of humankind is the paramount issue in the religious and political conditions of the world of today. History shows that there has been much bloodshed and warfare. Thus, in today's world, it is important to utilise the energies to seek new paths of fellowship and unity, 'to unlearn the science of war and devote supreme human forces to the blessed arts of peace' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 229). 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 36) also quotes Bahá'u'lláh, who said, 'Ye are all leaves of one tree and the drops of one sea'.

The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi (1974, p. 43), states that the implication of the principle of the Oneness of Humanity is an 'organic change in the structure of present-day society'. On an individual level, the recognition of the principle of the Oneness of Humanity reveals and assures the dignity and innate potential of each human being. On the societal level, the 1998 statement of the Bahá'í International Community proclaims the following:

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that recognition of the fundamental spiritual principle of our age, the Oneness of Humanity, must be at the heart of a new civilisation. Universal acceptance of this principle will both necessitate and make possible major restructuring of the world's educational, social, agricultural, industrial, economic, legal and political systems. This restructuring, which must be ordered by an ongoing and intensive dialogue between the two systems of knowledge available to humankind – science and religion – will facilitate the emergence of peace and justice throughout the world (Bahá'í International Community, 1998, p. 1).

In summary, the fundamental teaching of the Oneness of Humanity refers to the essential nobility of human beings and emphasises that physical appearances do not make one group superior to another. In order to reach absolute unity, humankind should be free of all types of prejudices. The expression of love towards each other causes the power of unity to grow stronger.

The unity of humanity is realised through the Manifestations of God and their consent to endure hardships for the sake of human beings. The recognition of this basic teaching implies an organic change in every aspect of the structure of today's society.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has given an insight into the three fundamental teachings that underlie the philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í world view – the Oneness of God, the Oneness of Religion and the Oneness of Humanity. One can conclude from these that the Bahá'í Faith is committed to recognising the value of all human beings and all religions, with a focus on the Manifestations of God as the means by which we can help to change the structure of society so that prejudice no longer exists and humankind can be truly united. It serves as an introduction to, and basis for understanding Bahá'í perspectives on education and principles of wisdom – the conceptual framework of the Bahá'í Faith – which are presented in Chapter Four, and which inspired the founding and continued operation of NCCI as a Bahá'í-inspired school.

## **Chapter Four: Bahá'í Perspectives and Conceptual Framework**

### **Introduction**

The aim of my research was to investigate how teachers in a Bahá'í-inspired school understand and seek to nurture wisdom in their students. As background to this investigation, it was necessary to explore the Bahá'í concept of wisdom from the Bahá'í literature and to select a Bahá'í-inspired school to provide practical data on the role of the school in nurturing wisdom in its students.

This research was grounded in a concept fundamental to the Bahá'í Faith, namely, the Principle of Innate Wisdom. Bahá'ís understand this concept as meaning that human reality, which is essentially spiritual, has been endowed with qualities or attributes that also belong to God. All human beings have been created noble or good, as God does not create evil. Furthermore, Bahá'ís understand that every human being is endowed with innate divine qualities and attributes that he or she has the potential to reflect.

It is also a Bahá'í belief that every soul on this earth has the capacity to know God and to love Him. Bahá'u'lláh (1983, p. 65), the Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, states that God has 'focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes' upon the reality of human beings 'and made it a mirror of His own Self'. Therefore, human beings have the potential to reflect all of God's qualities or attributes such as love, compassion, kindness, generosity and mercy, which they possess inherently. Wisdom is the determining capacity through which all other capacities are mediated.

From a Bahá'í perspective, a human being has two natures –the spiritual or higher nature, and the material or lower nature. An individual approaches God through the spiritual nature and is attracted to the material things of this world through the material nature. It should be noted that being attracted to the material things is not necessarily a bad thing. We need to live in this material world in order to be able to fulfil our God-given capacities and the purpose of our lives. Being detached from this world does not mean practising monasticism or being poor. The guidance of the Bahá'í writings is that we should not fall in love with the things of this world, and their attainment should not become the purpose and goal of our lives. The development of wisdom is important and is connected with both aspects of human nature.

A human being also has a spirit or rational soul that is capable of discovering the realities of things as far as human ability permits in this world. The human being's mind is the power of the human spirit or the rational soul. In other words, the spirit or the rational soul manifests itself in the human reality through the mind, which acquires knowledge through the sciences and arts, and has the power of understanding.

Education plays a vital role in the acquisition of both material and spiritual knowledge. The Bahá'í perspective is that a child should acquire both physical or material knowledge, as well as spiritual or divine knowledge in order to fulfil his/her purpose in this world. Material knowledge from the sciences and arts, and spiritual knowledge from the Word of God both help to awaken the innate wisdom within the individual.



It is also Bahá'í belief that education and training of spiritual qualities are more important than education and training of material knowledge. Therefore, the nurturing of these God-given innate attributes becomes of paramount importance. This is because the nurturing of the God-given innate qualities enables the individual to apply the material knowledge in a wise way for the well-being of humanity. The more an individual or child develops the spiritual attributes with which he/she has been endowed, the more he/she can reflect these attributes in this world and the more he/she can contribute to the advancement of a just society.

### **Bahá'í perspective of education**

It is important to note that the Bahá'ís do not claim to have a discrete Bahá'í theory of education. What the Bahá'ís have is the Bahá'í writings, which need to be researched thoroughly in order for a system of universal education to be discerned that will cater for the needs of an ever-advancing civilisation. It is the Bahá'ís belief that Bahá'í principles are applicable universally and can contribute to the education of all humanity. The purpose of the embryonic efforts of the Bahá'í community worldwide is to apply certain of the Bahá'í Faith's concepts and principles of education to real conditions.

The Bahá'í approach to education is one of physical and spiritual empowerment. The development of spiritual qualities is even more important than developing physical skills and capacities. Spiritual qualities empower the individual to express his/her talents through unity and peace, whilst an exclusive focus on physical or material things alone causes ignorance and injustice.

It is understood that when a civilisation is established on sound spiritual principles, economic development will take place naturally. In this light, the purpose of

education would be to enable an individual to gain both physical and spiritual knowledge, skills, qualities, attitudes and capacities. Such an individual is then able to become an active agent of their own growth and, more importantly, become a responsible participant in a systematic process of building the ever-advancing civilisation. Bahá'ís believe that this vision can be achieved when the efforts of an educational system are directed not only towards intellectual development and training but also to the infusion of moral values within an individual.

The individual from a Bahá'í perspective is spiritual in nature. The mind or human intelligence is the fruit of a spiritual dimension of existence that distinguishes human beings from the rest of creation. This human intelligence, when attracted to the spiritual guidance of the religious teachings, furnishes human beings with potentialities that become evident through a process of spiritual and material development. The role of education as seen by Bahá'ís is the development of the latent capacities within every human being in order to transform society through the expression of service. In this light, education is seen as a system that contributes to individual growth and helps bring about fundamental changes to the structure of society in order to create a just and peaceful environment. Moreover, in order to achieve social and economic goals, it is important to motivate the individual through the inner forces of his/her spiritual reality so that the acquired scientific knowledge results in true prosperity.

The Bahá'í approach to education promotes the principle of independent investigation of truth, where faith and reason collaborate to train the mind. It also creates an awareness of the fundamental unity of humankind in every individual,

where people begin to see each other as members of one human family, eradicating gender, ethnic, nationality, class and religious prejudices.

## **Principles of wisdom from the Bahá'í perspective**

### **1. The Principle of Innate Wisdom**

#### *a) The Innate Capacity in Humans*

Every human being has been created noble, which means that he/she has innate potential or capacity within the soul or spirit. Although this potential needs to be nurtured in order for it to yield fruit, the fact remains that human beings are essentially noble creatures, born with a deep innate dimension. Bahá'u'lláh (1983, p. 65) refers to this innate potential of human beings as energies that lie hidden within the individual:

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 90) explains the innate potential within human beings by comparing this dimension of human reality to a seed:

If we sow the seed, a mighty tree appears from it. The virtues of the seed are revealed in the tree; it puts forth branches, leaves, blossoms, and produces fruits. All these virtues were hidden and potential in the seed. Through the blessing and bounty of cultivation these virtues became apparent. Similarly, the merciful God, our Creator, has deposited within human realities certain latent and potential virtues. Through education and culture these virtues deposited by the loving God will become apparent in the human reality, even as the unfoldment of the tree from within the germinating seed.

From the Bahá'í perspective, the source of these innate qualities latent within individuals is none other than God, the Creator of the universe, the 'Day Star of Divine bounty' and the 'Source of heavenly guidance'.

*b) Degrees and Domain of the Innate Capacity*

All human beings, according to the Bahá'í Faith, are endowed by the Creator with a range of innate potential capacities. Wisdom is a central capacity. A difference in degree of capacity exists among human souls. Similarly, there is difference in capability and so individuals differ from one another. Although each human being has the capacity to reflect all the attributes of God, including wisdom, this is done in varying degrees according to each individual's inherent potential. In turn, each individual's expectation of God is based on the individual's degree of potential. No one is fully aware of the degree of one's own potential or any other person's. What is important is that human beings should continuously strive to fulfil their God-given capacities.

The ultimate challenge for a human being, from a Bahá'í perspective, is spiritual in nature. What can transform a human being and ultimately society is each individual's inner consciousness. This inner consciousness has to do with the essential reality of each human being. The domain or seat of innate wisdom is this inner consciousness or soul. The body and the soul together form a human being, and the essential inner reality of each human being is his/her soul, which is manifested through his/her mind. It is the heart and the mind of the individual – both the emotional and the mental capacities—which need to be awakened and nurtured for the soul to conform to the Will of God to make right and wise decisions.

*c) Awakening the Innate Capacity*

Before the innate wisdom of an individual can be nurtured and developed through various modes of education, this inner capacity must be awakened so that the individual is conscious of the wisdom within. The Bahá'í writings express the necessity of all the members of the human race to be awakened to their inner capacities, especially wisdom.

The inner capacities of a human being are awakened through the Word of God as revealed to God's prophets. To know God through His Prophets and to obey their commandments is the primary purpose of our creation as human beings; and to know God and to worship Him fulfils all the God-given capacities of human beings, particularly the potential capacity of innate wisdom, which is, first of all, a capacity to seek, know and love God, and to nurture the innate potential present in every human being. This innate potential must first be brought to consciousness so that the individual can seek and know God.

## **2. The Principle of Nurture**

When the individual becomes aware of possessing latent capacities through an educator, such as a parent or school teacher, these latent capacities need to be nurtured through education using three catalysts: the creative Word of God; bodies of human knowledge; and realms of nature.

*a) The Word of God*

The Word of God, similar to a 'master key', has the potential to open all the locks. It has tremendous influence and power over the individual's heart. The Bahá'í writings state that the creative Word of God, sent through His messengers, comprises the

Holy Scriptures of all religions, and is the key to human progress. Throughout human history, the revealed Word of God, delivered through His Prophets in various religions, has been the source of advancement for humanity and the cause of betterment of the world. Bahá'u'lláh (1978, p. 173) describes the Word of God as:

...the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.

To study the Word of God necessitates the development of the capacity not only to read the Sacred Word regularly but also to meditate on its meaning. In this way, both prayer and study involve meditation. It is through such study that one gains insight and is motivated to live according to the Word.

As a result of this nurturing through reading and studying the Word of God, we become increasingly conscious of the wisdom within us. Prayer, meditation, study and service based on the Word of God can be facilitated through an educational system that promotes the Word of God.

Human beings need to be educated in order to make the right choice about their lives. A person cannot become a wise, spiritual being solely through his/her own efforts. A human being needs the Word of God to nurture his/her innate potential wisdom. Therefore, understanding the spiritual meaning and purpose of life is one of the fundamental principles of education.

*b) Bodies of Human Knowledge*

The Bahá'í belief states that whatever has been created is through the potency of the Word of God. From the Bahá'í perspective, the Prophets of God, such as Buddha, Krishna, Christ, Muhammad, The Bab and Bahá'u'lláh, bring spiritual laws that are

fundamentally the same and come from the same source, namely, God. However, the purpose of their appearance is also to bring new social laws according to the level of maturity of humanity. These social laws lay the foundation for an ever advancing civilisation, and new branches of knowledge and understandings stem from these laws, which can be in the form of the main principles of a particular Faith. Therefore, all humanity is imbued with wisdom and the evidence of that wisdom is the discoveries made through understanding the sciences and arts.

Hence, nurturing wisdom involves the study of all the sciences and arts that have been implanted through history. From the Bahá'í perspective, the study of sciences and arts is considered an act of worship, which is why:

...education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 398).

One of the everlasting gifts humanity possesses is the gift of intellectual investigation and research. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 50) states:

...science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible. Therefore seek with diligent endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.

The nurturing of innate wisdom therefore involves an interaction between the wisdom revealed in the Word of God, the wisdom that comes to consciousness within the individual and the wisdom discerned in humanity at large.

c) *The Natural World*

Another source or catalyst for nurturing wisdom is the natural world that God has created. God has given human beings the innate capacity to discern the knowledge embedded in nature. One can also examine the principles of nature in order to understand spiritual realities. However, once again, these principles should be related to the truths that are mentioned in the sacred writings, otherwise they could be misleading.

The Bahá'í writings are replete with examples of how nature explains spiritual concepts. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the example of the baby in the mother's womb and its birth into the world to explain the concept of human beings' immortality. Further, he draws a parallel between the parts of the body the baby should acquire in the mother's womb to be able to live in this world, and the spiritual qualities human beings should nurture and develop in this world to prepare themselves for the worlds beyond ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1968, p. 63).

Just as the novice in the Biblical *Book of Proverbs*<sup>2</sup> (King James Version) is urged to consider the ways of the ant and 'become wise' (*Proverbs* 6.6), so the Bahá'í learner is urged to study the ways or principles of the natural world to discern the hidden spiritual realities. In the process of examining such principles in nature, the child's innate wisdom is nurtured and grows.

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us.

Thus, we cannot say that once a heart is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world; his inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other

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<sup>2</sup> All references in this thesis to the Bible and Proverbs within the Bible have been taken from the King James Version of the Bible, translated from the Original Tongues. Published by Gideons International USA (1961).



and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions (Shoghi Effendi, 1933a, pp. 84-85).

### **3. The Principle of Commitment (Faith)**

A human being's nurtured wisdom is to be expressed in a life of commitment, especially commitment to searching for God and God's will, discerning the truth, pursuing justice and keeping a kind tongue.

#### *a) Commitment to Searching for God's Will*

As human beings become aware of God's love and mercy towards them, and realise that the love of God is the very cause of their existence, they will not want to displease God. Disobedience to the laws of God that are revealed by His Manifestations will act as barriers that separate the individual from the spiritual world and prevent the blessings of God to reach to that individual. Individuals should not be afraid of God as if He is a tyrant, but rather should fear God's justice. The Bahá'í writings also give the assurance that God's mercy always exceeds His justice.

Based on the above understanding of the word 'fear', Bahá'u'lláh (1988b, p. 27 ) states that 'the fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures'. Fear in the sense of love and reverence for God becomes a prime factor in the education of a human being when it motivates the individual through understanding that the purpose of one's life in this world and the immortality of the soul is to strive to reflect God's attributes. The Bahá'í writings state that human beings have been created noble, which means that the essence of each individual is good. Each individual has the potential to reflect God's attributes according to his/her own capacity.

The fear of God protects the individual in such a way that no action will be taken that is contrary to the Will of God and outside the law of God. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b, p. 27) states:

The fear of God hath ever been a sure defence and a safe stronghold for all the peoples of the world. It is the chief cause of the protection of mankind, and the supreme instrument for its preservation.

*b) Commitment to Discerning the Truth*

The Bahá'í writings encourage individuals to seek truth and investigate reality. There is guidance as to what truth is, how it can be discerned and what its influence is on human beings. Within this principle and the need for discerning the truth lies an understanding of the necessity of harmony between religion and science:

Religion must conform to science and reason, otherwise, it is superstition. God has created man in order that he may perceive the verity of existence and endowed him with mind or reason to discover truth. Therefore, scientific knowledge and religious belief must be conformable to the analysis of this divine faculty in man ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 287).

To be able to investigate and discern truth calls for a state of mind that is free from any type of prejudice, as prejudice causes human beings to reject and repudiate the truth if it is found to be contrary to one's inclinations. An open mind is the pre-requisite to seeking truth.

*c) Commitment to Pursuing Justice*

A commitment to discernment of truth implies not only enlightenment and understanding but also implementation and proper use of the knowledge gained, which could translate into justice and service to the world of humanity. The question

here is, what is justice? Bahá'u'lláh (1978, p. 66) says that ‘the purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men’, and states:

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye (1978, p. 157).

From an individual’s point of view, ‘justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood’ (Bahá’í International Community, 1995b, p. 5). Each individual is to discern with his/her own eyes, not through the eyes of others in his/her group. Justice at this level requires the individual to be fair in his/her judgement and to treat others with equity (Bahá’í International Community, 1995b, p. 5).

*d) Commitment to a Kind Tongue*

Our words, which stem from our thoughts, become a guide to our actions. Kind thoughts and words engender kind deeds. Hence, nurtured innate wisdom is also manifested through kind words and deeds. There are many references in the Bahá’í writings with regard to the need and necessity of a kindly tongue, for example:

A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988, p. 15).

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh states that a kind tongue is like a magnet which attracts people’s hearts. A kind tongue is able to convey the speaker’s true meaning. Most misunderstandings occur because of not understanding the inner meaning of the spoken statement or not being able to convey the true meaning. A kind tongue has

the power to clothe the words with meaning, as if to protect it from harsh misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

Kind speech is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding. The fountain can be understood as the source of water, and water flows to other parts of a garden from the fountain. Thus, a kind tongue is able to pave the way for greater insight and understanding to occur. The kindly tongue of an individual is like a fountain that flows to others with truth and depth of understanding. More importantly, the knowledge has been accumulated with humility and is communicated with humility. ‘A fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding’ (Bahá’u’lláh, 1983, p. 289) can also be likened to a source or a deep conviction that always flows, can never be overtaken by change and is manifested through a kindly tongue.

## **Conclusion**

Innate wisdom reaches its full potential when the individual makes a commitment to exhibit his/her nurtured wisdom in wise speech, wise actions and wise reverence for God. Innate wisdom is the greatest gift and the highest blessing, and it needs to be nurtured. Nurture takes place not only through the individual’s efforts but also through the Word of God.

The first step for the individual is to be awakened to his or her innate wisdom potential. The second step is to nurture and develop this great gift. The third step is to be committed to putting the wisdom that has been nurtured within the soul and mind into action in the form of service to others. Thus parents, teachers and care-givers play a vital role in the life of children and the youths. It is of the utmost importance to be able to provide an environment to help children develop wisdom.

This chapter has referred to the intent of the research to investigate how teachers in a Bahá'í-inspired school understand and seek to nurture wisdom in their students in connection with the Bahá'í perspective on education. It has provided a Bahá'í conceptual framework for the research, consisting of the Principle of Innate Wisdom, the Principle of Nurture and the Principle of Commitment.

The next chapter (Chapter Five) discusses the concepts of wisdom from selected views of three other theoretical perspectives, namely philosophical (classical), psychological and religious (Biblical studies), which leads on to the discussion of the Bahá'í perspectives on education in Chapter Six.

## **Chapter Five: Concepts of Wisdom – Selected Views**

This chapter briefly reflects on three theoretical perspectives of wisdom – philosophy, psychology and Biblical studies – which inform the conceptual framework. A detailed discussion of these perspectives is beyond the scope of this thesis, therefore only a short outline from each discipline is offered to provide an insight into the perspective on wisdom in that field of study. The focus of this examination of the three perspectives is to define wisdom and its acquisition.

### **The concepts of wisdom**

Wisdom is a plural and complex concept, and therefore difficult to understand and describe. The concept of wisdom has intrigued many philosophers, psychologists, religious people and others in many cultures for many centuries. It is interesting to note that the concept of wisdom has always been associated with ‘the good’. Wisdom cannot be bad and its application enables human beings to live happier, fuller lives. There are many definitions of wisdom that describe its positive influence and nature.

Historically, the concept of wisdom has been a significant factor in causing great thinkers and philosophers to contemplate the questions of who we are, why we exist, what is our relationship to humanity or the universe, and what happens when we die. Such questions have led to identifying what is good in an ongoing search for truth.

Baltes and Smith (1990, pp. 112, 96) define wisdom as ‘a body of expert knowledge in the domain fundamental pragmatics of life’. Birren and Fisher (1990, p. 323) state that wisdom has a hierarchical nature, ‘that is, it is the optimum, ultimate expression of a blend of human qualities’. Pascual-Leone (1990, p. 272) believes that wisdom is

distinct from creativity and intelligence as it involves not just cognitions ‘but affect and personality as a whole’. He goes on to state that wisdom allows ‘a weakening of ego-centred characteristics, which leads to greater intuition and an empathic understanding of Other, self, world, and nature as equally strong concerns’ (Pascual-Leone, 1990, p. 272).

Wisdom concerns not only the physical nature of a human being but also the spiritual nature, or what many have described as ‘the soul’. It should be noted also that wisdom is not about just material or just spiritual. Rather, it is about creating balance so that both the material and spiritual can exist in harmony. In this way, wisdom is about how human beings can live their day-to-day lives in the material world – this physical existence – with spiritual consciousness. Nabobo (1994, p. 41) refers to spiritual wisdom and how it brings about balance, stating that spiritual wisdom allows the individual to gain ‘insight, hope, and the ability to affirm their sense of identity’. She explains that wisdom entails a spiritual dimension to life that involves not only the material but also the spiritual reality. In her observation of Thai culture, Ma Rhea (1996, p. 75) points to the domain of wisdom when stating:

For Thai people, there was no split between the brain and the heart. In both Buddhist and secular approaches to the cultivation of wisdom, informants often pointed out for my benefit that the processes of thinking that train the mind train both the heart and the brain together.... Neither ‘higher’ wisdom or ‘worldly’ wisdom could arise if only the brain is trained.

Baba (1993) states that spiritual wisdom does not refer to acquisition and accumulation of knowledge, rather it is the appropriate use of that knowledge that consequently empowers one ‘to face the challenges of life more effectively’. A similar thought is echoed by Staudinger (1996, p. 283) who believes that although

collective knowledge becomes manifest in sayings and proverbs, wisdom is only contained in ‘their insightful application to a given problem’.

### **Classical background – concepts of ancient Greek wisdom**

Robinson (1990, pp. 13-24) gives a brief history of philosophical views on wisdom in his paper ‘Wisdom through the ages’, in Sternberg’s (1990) collection of papers *Wisdom, its nature, origins, and development*. Robinson (1990, p. 14) states that ‘the Platonic dialogues offer the earliest record of a sustained analysis of the concept of wisdom’. Robinson draws on his own works *An intellectual history of psychology* (1981), *Toward a science of human nature: essays on the psychologies of Hegel, Mill, Wundt and James* (1982), and *Aristotle’s psychology* (1989) and other authors to provide the background for Sternberg’s collection of papers

The analysis of the Platonic dialogues suggests that the term ‘wisdom’ refers to different aspects of intellectual, moral and ordinary life. Wisdom is seen as taking three forms. First, wisdom as *sophia* refers to the special gift of the philosopher and all who have dedicated themselves to a thoughtful life in pursuit of truth. Second, wisdom as *phronesis* refers to the ‘practical wisdom’ of individuals such as statesmen and lawgivers. In this case, being wise allows the statesman or lawgiver to take sensible actions that resist the influence of passions and to be wary of the deception of the senses. Third, wisdom as *episteme* is a form of scientific knowledge, belonging to those who know the inner nature of things and the principles governing their behaviour.

The Socratic conception of wisdom, either as *sophia* or *phronesis*, is considered to be one of the fundamental virtues that causes wisdom to transcend its relevancy to mere



cognition alone. As Robinson (1990, p. 14) points out, wisdom is considered to be ‘the first among the virtues ...and the only one that is innate’.

The Athenian in Plato’s *Laws* introduces the notion of ‘practical wisdom’ as the source of all political rule. Those who do not show wisdom will be stigmatised as ignorant in spite of their accomplished skills, mental precision and correctness.

Hence, Robinson (1990, pp. 14-15) suggests a distinction that those who are wise ‘may be illiterate’, whereas the unwise:

... may be adept and accomplished. The two classes are separated by a difference in character, by a principle of self-control, by their ability to subordinate passion and desire to the authority of reason.

Accordingly, the definition of a wise person is that of a person who is ‘temperamentally and morally won over to a love of harmony, beauty, and truth’ rather than a person who possesses a ‘high IQ’, or is a ‘chess master or a theoretical physicist’ (Robinson, 1990, pp. 14-15).

Socrates was convinced of the immortality of the soul and believed that ‘the soul is entombed in the physical body, the latter being no more than a prison (*desmoterion*) that prevents the free flight of spirit toward wisdom’. Robinson (1990, p. 15) is of the opinion that the Socratic conception of wisdom promotes the concept of a wise individual as a person who searches for ‘the timeless and unchanging truths’, regardless of the shifting phenomena of the material world. These timeless and unchanging truths cannot be found purely with reliance on human senses, which ‘distort and deceive and otherwise hinge one’s attention to the ephemeral and inconsequential’.

According to Aristotle, who, as Robinson (1990, p. 15) asserts, ‘provides history’s first integrated and systematic psychology’, attributes such as sensation are common in all animals. However, what distinguishes human beings from animals is ‘rationality; *epistemonikon*’ and the task or mission of a human being is a ‘life lived in conformity to the dictates of right reason’ (Robinson, 1990, p. 16). This life should represent the condition of prospering and wholeness that leads to a true and enduring joy which is not based on a set of pleasures or creature comforts. This condition is called *eudaimonia*, which stands for prosperity, happiness and good fortune. In order to attain *eudaimonia* one must ‘possess wisdom and be ruled by it’ (Robinson, 1990, p. 16).

Robinson (1990, p. 16) goes on to describe the mark of wisdom for Aristotle as being the ‘very character’ of the person as revealed in that person’s choices (*prohairesis*) and dispositions (*hexeis*). For example, while the emotion of anger is a natural feeling that is expressed by all species and is necessary for survival, the character of an individual becomes distinguished when the person chooses to manage the natural feeling in the appropriate way. Hence, anger against injustice and standing up for another person’s right is good, whereas anger against the good fortune of another person is called envy. Therefore, to be wise is to choose to have passions and desires that are rightly disposed and designed towards promoting the individual’s humanising attributes.

Wisdom also promotes true freedom. The individual who can ground his/her choices in considered and reflective reasoning rather than being enslaved by his/her passions is truly free.

Regardless of whether the individual is referring to practical wisdom, as in the example of anger, or is concerned with theoretical wisdom, which is devoted to truth, there is a need to understand the causes of things. Aristotle, as maintained by Robinson (1990, p. 17), believes that:

... the wise man knows more than the material or efficient or formal causes behind events. He knows, too, the Final Cause, the *that for the sake of which* the other causal modalities are engaged... To be wise is to know thyself, to know the special sort of creature one is and to proceed to develop that unique power that sets one apart from all else that lives. To be wise is to strive for a condition of moral perfection or virtue (*arete*) by which the 'golden mean' is found and adopted in all of the significant affairs of life.

The contemplative life that Aristotle promotes is not free from everyday, worldly challenges because a person who is devoted to development of his/her mind and to perfecting his/her virtues 'may also find himself a statesman, a lawgiver, a leader of the people (Robinson, 1990, p. 17).

#### *Socratic perspective on the definition and acquisition of wisdom*

Philosophy has traditionally been associated with the concept of wisdom, as the word 'philosophy' itself literally means 'the love of wisdom'. In this thesis the philosophical perspective on wisdom is discussed through a representative figure of this discipline, namely Socrates. It is important to note that Socrates also reflects points of continuity with the Bahá'í perspective on wisdom, which assists in explaining the collected data from the Bahá'í-inspired school that is explored and investigated in connection with this perspective.

Socrates was recognised historically as a 'wise' philosopher. In fact, it was said that Socratic wisdom exceeded all others (Calef, 1996, p. 35). The 'Delphic oracle's

famous pronouncement that “No one is wiser” than he’ (Calef, 1996, Ap.21a-23b) refers to Socrates and his depth of wisdom. We are then told that Socrates considered this statement a riddle, as he believed that it contradicted his own understanding of his image. Socrates considered himself ignorant, not wise, and therefore came ‘to interpret the riddle as an affirmation of his “human” wisdom, the knowledge that he knows little or nothing and that his wisdom is worthless’ (Calef , 1996, p. 35).

Socrates believed that wisdom lies in recognising one’s lack of it, and that wisdom is connected to knowledge in the sense that human wisdom makes one aware of one’s lack of divine wisdom. Calef (1996, p. 35) refers to this concept by stating that ‘Socrates is the wisest of the Athenians, not by virtue of any substantive knowledge of virtue (which he calls “more than human wisdom” [Calef, 1996, 20d-e]), but due to his humble self-understanding’.

‘Virtue’, from Socrates’ perspective, can be defined as ‘more than human wisdom’. In this respect it can be understood that virtue could be something divine possessed by God. Human wisdom could include human knowledge, intellect or understanding. Moreover, Socrates’ understanding was that human wisdom cannot comprehend the essence of ‘virtue’ or divine wisdom. However, to the extent that human intellect can understand the fact that the essence of divine wisdom is beyond human comprehension, that individual is wise. Humble self-understanding is the state of submissiveness to virtue, to something more than human wisdom. Once Socrates comes to this understanding, as stated by Calef (1996, p. 35), he ‘undertakes a mission on behalf of the god to show those who think themselves wise, but are not, the error of their ways [Calef, 1996, Ap. 23b,d]’.

Human wisdom is the gift of understanding and intellect in human beings that has the power to discover the inner realities of things in this world. In comparison to divine wisdom, however, it is utter nothingness and therefore referred to as worthless. Calef (1996, pp. 35-36) states that when the oracle suggests that:

... this man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless [28b], this implies that human wisdom, like Socrates' wisdom, is the highest attainable by mortals.

It is important to note that human wisdom is insignificant in comparison to divine wisdom or virtue, but it is of great value to Socrates, as he would not 'exchange it for the craftsmen's knowledge of many fine things' if the exchange would mean that he would also inherit their ignorance about 'other most important pursuits' (Calef, 1996, pp. 35-36).

Hence, Socrates' human wisdom is of great importance and value, as through his human wisdom Socrates not only understands that there is something greater than his own wisdom but also, in philosophising about the concept of virtue, he is able to avoid malevolence and evil. Thus, according to Socrates, human wisdom was worthwhile and needed because it enabled him to avoid evil. Calef (1996, p. 38) states that 'Socrates claims that a false belief about important matters is the greatest evil'. Human wisdom occurs when we know that we do not know. Consequently, we humbly and honestly deny knowledge about those things we do not know and which we seek to investigate. Socrates states that the helmsman who provides safe passage for travellers gives them no benefit because his craft only enables him to provide safe passage, but it does not determine if safe passage is something good. More importantly, human wisdom 'bears an important, positive relationship to cardinal virtues like courage, justice, and piety' (Calef, 1996, p. 36).

In Socratic philosophy, the reader is shown not only what prevents evil but also what brings about good. According to Socrates, the need to seek to know and investigate the good prevents human beings from committing erroneous acts. Moreover, as Calef (1996, p. 36) states, ‘Socrates claims that the greatest good for man is to discuss virtue and examine opinions daily’. ‘Discussing virtue’ denotes thought, reflection and consultation on the concept of virtue – what it is, what it stands for, what its purpose is and how can human wisdom relate to it? These skills are attained through the power of human wisdom or intellect. To discuss virtue requires the human mind or wisdom to understand it through various skills such as reflection, meditation and consultation. The same holds true for ‘examining opinions daily’. Moreover, for one to examine opinions daily one would have to bring into accountability what human wisdom or intellect does in accordance with virtue or divine wisdom. One could argue that to examine anything one would need a standard against which things can be examined. In this case, Socrates is proposing the examination of one’s opinion against divine wisdom. Calef (1996, p. 35) also notes that the reason for Socrates’ statement is that ‘philosophising is important because it conduces to truth and enables one to increase one’s stock of moral verities’.

### **Summary**

In the light of the above outline, the essential characteristics of wisdom in Socrates can be summarised as follows:

- The ultimate source of wisdom is God, whose wisdom exceeds all reality and is known as virtue.
- Human beings acquire wisdom through their intellect and virtue. Humans can use their intellect for the purpose of investigating the truth and enhancing their understanding of the inner realities of created things.
- An awareness of human ignorance is a valued prerequisite in seeking wisdom.
- Wisdom is more than knowledge about things; wisdom also involves developing the

capacity to understand that the essence of divine wisdom is ultimately beyond human comprehension and involves enabling one to control selfish human passions.

- The human being who possesses wisdom has the capacity to make moral decisions which are based on investigation of the truth, thus preventing one from committing erroneous acts and supporting the good.

Therefore, the components of wisdom include: human wisdom as inner capacity from God to pursue truth; knowledge and insight gained through questioning for the purpose of investigating the truth; and considering one's own knowledge and wisdom as nothing compared to divine wisdom and the need to bring oneself to account daily against the divine wisdom (virtue) standard.

### **General psychological background/outlook**

Kramer (1990) believes that cognitive and affective developments are interdependent phenomena whose interaction produces wisdom-related skills. These skills, or processes, enable an individual to resolve many adult tasks such as 'making life decisions, advising others, and engaging in spiritual reflection' (Kramer, 1990, p. 281). Kramer proposes that there are five functions of wisdom in adult life: (i) to enable the individual to resolve problems and make decisions; (ii) to advise others; (iii) to manage and guide society; (iv) to review one's life in order to provide meaning; and (v) to question the meaning of life. In support of other psychologists such as Moody and Hodges (1986 in Kramer, 1990), Kramer (1990, p. 287) argues that:

...other aspects of wisdom cannot be separated from spiritual wisdom if only because the intrapersonal development necessary for wisdom and spiritual development often go hand in hand.

Kramer (1990) also cites other psychologists (Clayton & Birren, 1980; Holliday & Chandler, 1986 in Kramer, 1990), who agree that wisdom incorporates an affective

dimension, and that cognition and affect are in fact at the heart of wisdom. Kramer (1990) uses the example of King Solomon, who was renowned for his sound judgement, ordering a baby to be cut in half and each half given to one of the mothers who claimed to be the rightful one. In this instance, Solomon's wisdom lay 'in his recognition that emotion must be taken into account in the solution of the problem' (Kramer, 1990, p. 306). King Solomon's judgement appears to fit Kitchener and Brenner's (1990, p. 216) description of wisdom as 'a kind of intellectual ability that allows a few individuals to make particularly exceptional judgments about uncertain, problematic life issues'.

Meacham (1990, p. 183), like Socrates, is of the view that 'the more one knows, the more one realises the extent of what one does not know'. He states that 'the essence of wisdom is to hold the attitude that knowledge is fallible and to strive for a balance between knowing and doubting' (Meacham, 1990, p. 181). He holds that one should not merely acquire more and more, rather one should strive to question about what might be known.

The psychological perspective tends to support the view that an individual who has wisdom has certain abilities to apply virtues that are conducive to an excellent style of living, one which denotes understanding and harmony between spiritual and material, or between mind and body. A wise person also 'seeks truth to the extent it is knowable and evaluates information so as to understand how it relates to truth' (Sternberg, 1990, p. 157).

#### *Sternberg's perspectives on the definition and acquisition of wisdom*

The psychological perspective offers the reader another opportunity to define wisdom and understand its relationship with education. Similar to the philosophical



perspective, the psychological perspective on wisdom is discussed through a representative figure of this discipline – Sternberg. While the field of psychology discusses the definition and the role of wisdom in a variety of contexts, Sternberg’s view of the necessity of teaching wisdom in schools is a relevant focus in this thesis. Similar to the Socratic perspective, Sternberg reflects points of continuity with the Bahá’í perspective on the topic of wisdom. Thus, Sternberg’s (2002, p. 122) statement that ‘because wisdom involves the infusion of values into judgments and decision-making, any presentation about wisdom inevitably reflects the values of the presenter’ befits this presentation.

Sternberg (2002, p. 119) gives the following definition of wisdom:

Wisdom means knowing what you know, knowing what you don’t know, knowing what you can know at a given time and place, and knowing what you cannot know. Wisdom is not a quantitative trait but is about balance and about applying ‘successful intelligence’ to the attainment of some common good. Thus, wisdom involves an appreciation of human values.

Sternberg identified four fallacies that smart people are most likely to commit: egocentrism; omniscience; omnipotence; and invulnerability. These demonstrate that simple intelligence does not bring about wisdom. As Sternberg (2002, p. 123) points out, ‘it is not that intelligence does not matter; it simply is not enough’. In fact, intelligence on its own can be the cause of the four fallacies. As explained by Sternberg (2002, p. 121), the egocentrism fallacy is ‘where a person starts to think that the whole world revolves around him or her’. This in turn leads to the omniscience fallacy, ‘which is believing that not only is it all about you, but that you also know everything’. The omnipotence fallacy is the belief that ‘since you know everything there is to be known, you can do what you want’. Finally, the invulnerability fallacy is the belief ‘that not only can you do whatever you want, but

you can also get away with it. No one will figure out what you have done, or even if they do, you will still get off scot-free’.

Sternberg talks about ‘successful intelligence’ – the combination of analytical, creative and practical intelligence – as the starting point to define wisdom. However, Sternberg (2002, p. 124) states that ‘the critical notion in the theory of wisdom is balance... .. wisdom is the application of successful intelligence to the attainment of a common good’.

Balance is needed between the individual’s needs and the needs of the community. Under all conditions one has to be aware of the consequences of the actions and decisions one makes. One has to be constantly and conscientiously aware of the result and effect of one’s decisions on other people. What one studies, what employment one seeks, one’s thoughts, one’s behaviours, one’s attitude and application of one’s skill should all be aimed towards the betterment of humanity, and in the interest of not only one’s self but the entire human race. As Sternberg (2001, p. 235) asserts, wisdom is about ‘reflective responses that balance considerations in search of a common good’, and:

...wisdom is a story about balance. It is in the application of successful intelligence to balance your own interests with the interests of other people and with the interests of larger entities – entities like your community or country or the natural world – in order to adapt to and shape and select your environment over the short and long term in the service of a common good (Sternberg, 2002, p. 127).

Sternberg (2001, p. 231) explains that problems requiring wisdom always involve at least some element of each of three interests: a) intrapersonal interests, which might include such things as the desire to enhance one’s popularity or prestige, to increase

one's spiritual well-being and to increase one's power; b) the interpersonal interests, which might be quite similar, except they apply to other people rather than oneself; and c) the extra personal interests, which might include helping one's community, contributing to the well-being of one's country and serving God. Sternberg (2001, p. 231) further suggests that:

... wisdom involves a balancing not only of the three kinds of interests, but also of three possible courses of action in response to this balancing: adaptation of oneself or others to existing environments, shaping of environments to render them more compatible with oneself or others, and selection of new environments

It is interesting to note Sternberg's (2001, p. 231) statement on values, 'What constitutes appropriate balancing of interests, an appropriate response to the environment, and even the common good, all hinge on values', and its connection to wisdom.

The question of values and its relationship with wisdom is important because it defines the standard according to which one must act. The standard is then the yard stick according to which one may balance one's own interests and the interests of all. A set of values then denotes, for example, the standard of justice, standard of unity and peace, standard of the honour of humanity, standard of virtues in the human world, standard of human rights and standard of education. Sternberg (2001, p. 237) believes that:

... it is impossible to speak of wisdom outside the context of a set of values, which in combination may lead one to a moral stance.... Values mediate how one balances interest and responses, and collectively contribute even to how one defines a common good...

In this way, Sternberg (2001, p. 231) asserts that ‘values ... are an integral part of wise thinking’. The question that arises and, to some extent, is answered by

Sternberg, is the question of whose values should be considered as the standard.

Sternberg (2002, p. 122) believes that:

... fundamental values appear to be largely the same across the world’s great religious and ethical systems ... reciprocity, sincerity, honesty, integrity and compassion are commonly valued. It seems that there are some universal values that can serve as a basis for understanding wisdom.

This thought reflects a point of continuity with the Bahá’í perspective on wisdom described in the previous chapter.

According to Sternberg, the role of schools in facilitating wisdom is an extremely important one. Sternberg (2001, pp. 227-228) gives several reasons as to why it is important to develop wisdom in schools. He explains that:

First, a goal of schooling should be not just to impart knowledge, but to help students develop wise use of such knowledge.... Second, the teaching of wise thinking has always been implicit in school curricula.... So it seems a reasonable proposal to make explicit what has previously been implicit. Third, if adults do not make wise decisions, schools perhaps deserve a share of the blame if they have never conscientiously prepared these adults to make such decisions.

Finally, Sternberg (2001, p. 237) acknowledges that knowledge on its own does not guarantee satisfaction or happiness; that wisdom provides a mindful way to enter values into important judgments; that wisdom represents an avenue to creating a better, more harmonious world; and that students who will become future parents and leaders are always part of a community who will benefit from learning to judge rightly, and justly on behalf of their community.

## **Summary**

In light of this outline, the essential characteristics of wisdom in Sternberg's perspective can be summarised as follows:

- The ultimate source of wisdom is not identified.
- Human beings acquire wisdom through proper application of knowledge for the benefit of common good, and through explicit teaching of wisdom skills in schools and observance of wise adults as role models.
- An appreciation of human values and the desire to work for the common good are essential in seeking human wisdom.
- Wisdom is not a quantitative trait but is about the capacity to apply a balance of successful intelligence and a concern for values in the attainment of common good. Intelligence on its own is the cause of four fallacies: egocentrism; omniscience; omnipotence; and invulnerability.
- Values are an integral part of wise thinking. What constitutes appropriate balancing of interests, an appropriate response to the environment and the common good all hinge on understanding and practicing universal values common to all religions.

Therefore, the components of wisdom include the explicit teaching of the application of acquired knowledge for the attainment of common good, and an awareness and appreciation of human values and their role in bringing about a balance of one's interest with the interest of all human beings and nature.

## **General religious/spiritual background**

Various religious authors have commented on the gap that exists between science and religion, or reason and faith. Khursheed (1995, p. 46) states:

Since questions such as the existence of God lie outside the realm of empirical science, they are somehow considered less urgent, less significant.

This statement is reflective of the gap between scientific knowledge and religious knowledge. Khursheed (1995, p. 46) is of the view that the current society has been unable to achieve peace and tranquility because it has failed to develop the spiritual

dimension of humanity. The scientific world view largely denies the fact that human beings experience two complementary realities, namely the physical or material reality and the spiritual reality. The material reality has been well catered for with the advancement of scientific discoveries, however the growth of spiritual reality has been lagging behind to the extent that human beings are seen as objects among other objects.

Sherrard (1987, p. 67) states:

The new inorganic scientific order is man-made, not divine.... Its ideals, if they can be called that, are purely temporal and finite, and concern but the material well-being of its members.

Scientific progress is a vital and necessary part of the growth of humanity. However, it seems that the abundance of communication systems, technological discoveries and scientific knowledge can become unproductive if humanity does not know who they are educating and for what purpose. Technology on its own is like a body without a soul; its purpose and objective will not be for the benefit of humankind when it lacks human virtues. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990, p. 32) quote Kant, who urged us to develop a morality based on an understanding of the ‘world as an ordered whole of interconnected goals, as a system of final causes’. They stress the urgent need for ‘wisdom, or the systematic pursuit of the connection between the branches - a “science of the whole”.’ Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990, p. 43) suggest that:

No matter how ridiculous, the attempt to bridge between science and religion, between human greed and nature’s need, between what is and what ought to be, has to go on if we are to make sense of what is happening in such a way that humanity is to survive.

Scientific knowledge and advancement should not prevent humanity from perceiving issues from a philosophical or religious point of view. Different forms and methods of knowledge enrich our perceptions and allow for a sounder judgement to be made. Science and religion can be viewed as two complementary subjects, which, when studied together, will enlighten our experiences and open doors for further investigation. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990, p. 28) argue that ‘science may not be a substitute for earlier epistemologies such as religion or wisdom’.

*A religious perspective on wisdom – the Book of Proverbs*

The religious perspective is the final perspective explored in this chapter in an attempt to define wisdom and to understand its relationship with education. From a Bahá’í perspective, the spiritual essence of all religions is one. For the purpose of this section, it is envisaged that a Biblical perspective will represent a typical religious point of view. As with the philosophical and psychological perspectives, the Biblical perspective will also reflect points of continuity with the Bahá’í perspective.

The *Book of Proverbs* is a classic Biblical text that reflects the nature of wisdom within what is generally known as the ‘wisdom literature’ in the Bible. *Proverbs* is a composite work that includes both a systematic introduction to the subject of wisdom (chapters 1-9) and several collections of proverbs gathered by the wise (chapters 10-31). The primary source for the summary provided here is Norman Habel, a recognised scholar in Biblical wisdom literature (Habel, 1972).

Broadly speaking, there are three domains of wisdom reflected in the *Book of Proverbs* and wisdom literature in general, namely folk wisdom, school wisdom and theological wisdom.

**Folk wisdom** is represented by collections of proverbs from everyday life and sayings that reflect how one should live, based on daily experience and observation. The wise person lives by such proverbs and the fool ignores them. Typical examples are *Proverbs* 14.1 and 16:

A wise woman builds her house,  
But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.

The wise are cautious and turn away from evil,  
But the fool throws off constraint and is careless.

The values and insights about what constitutes wisdom in daily life are derived from two sources: observation and tradition. By observing the natural world or the social world, a wise person can discern truths about life and how best to live. A good example is *Proverb* 6.6-8:

Go to the ant, you lazybones;  
Consider its ways and be wise.  
Without having any chief or officer or ruler  
It prepares its food in summer  
And gathers its sustenance in harvest.

This passage illustrates not only the significance of observing the natural world and discovering its truth as a scientist would do, but also reveals that the observation of the natural world indicates how one should live wisely in the social world. The wise were the scientists and educators of the ancient world.

The process of handing down the tradition of folk wisdom is illustrated by frequent injunctions for the child to listen and learn from the parents' teachings. The following verses from *Proverbs* 22.19, 22.26 illustrate this process:

Hear, my child, and be wise  
And direct your mind in the way.



Listen to your father who begot you,  
And do not despise your mother when she is old.  
My child, give me your heart  
And let your eyes observe my ways.

The 'way' is a technical term for the path of wisdom handed down by the parents and the teachers of wisdom. The parents' ways are the living expression of the way of wisdom.

The 'way' is also a technical term for the inner character of any domain of nature, whether it be that of a creature such as an ant (*Proverbs* 6.6) or a force such as lightning (*Job* 38.25, King James Version). The search for wisdom involves an exploration of the ways in nature that have been implanted by God. The wise know not only the 'ways' of other humans in society but the 'ways' imbedded in the physical world (*Proverbs* 30.18.19).

**School wisdom** is used here as a designation for the wisdom taught by the 'wise', the learned men [sic] in society who constituted a discrete social group, quite distinct from prophets and priests. The wise appear to have functioned in two major domains: the city gate and the palace. In the city gate or palace they were the source of guidance for youths who chose to follow the way of wisdom as a special focus or profession.

In the palace, kings such as Solomon gathered a group of wise men in the court to function as counselors, ambassadors and teachers. The work of the wise as teachers in the Israelite court was comparable to that found in the schools of the courts of ancient Egypt, one of the great sources of ancient wisdom.

In the opening chapters (1-9) of *Proverbs*, the references to father and son probably do not reflect a biological relationship (as in 22.19 above), but rather a teacher/student relationship. Thus, we read in *Proverbs* 4.1-2, 10-11:

Listen, children, to your father's instruction,  
And be attentive that you may gain insight (wisdom);  
For I give you good precepts:  
Do not forsake my teaching.  
Hear, my child, and accept my words,  
That the years of your life may be many.  
I have taught you the 'way' of wisdom;  
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.

The injunction of the wise teachers in such schools is to give wisdom priority in life and embrace 'her' [sic] as if she were a beloved. In *Proverbs* 4.7-8, the wise teacher enjoins:

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom!  
And whatever else you get, get insight!  
Prize her highly and she will exalt you;  
She will honour you if you embrace her.

The language of this reference points to the practice of personifying wisdom as a woman whom the young men should pursue and embrace, rather than the women of the street, as learning is far greater than lust.

Those who follow the way of wisdom espoused by the wise in such schools will live both a righteous and secure life. Through such wisdom teaching, says *Proverbs* 2.9-10:

You will understand righteousness and justice  
And equity and every good path;  
For wisdom will come into your heart  
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

At one level, such wisdom may be viewed as secular, empirical wisdom gained through observation of nature and society. The truths of such observation are handed down by the wise from generation to generation. In the background, the wise recognised their Maker, not necessarily in terms of worship activities, but in terms of living according to wisdom. *Proverbs* 14.31 illustrates this perspective:

Those who oppress the poor, insult their Maker,  
But those who are kind to the needy honour him.

**Theological wisdom** seems to have developed in ancient Israel as the wisdom of the wise, and been incorporated into the religious faith of the priests and prophets of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Theological wisdom emphasised that the beginning of wisdom required more than observation, tradition or teaching from the wise; it required a prior attitude of reverence to Yahweh.

In his book *Wisdom in Proverbs*, Whybray (1965, p. 96) talks about the development of the concept of wisdom, explaining that the word ‘fear’, when used in connection with the word God, refers to a standard of moral conduct and embraces:

... every aspect of reverence towards them [gods], including both worship (II Kings 17.35) and obedience (II Kings 17.7f.) ... in II Kings 17, ... the fear of Yahweh ... is closely associated with the Covenant (vv.38f.). In Deuteronomy (10.12f.) it is closely associated not only with obedience to Yahweh but also with love for him.

Whybray (1965, p. 98), referring to the divine origin of wisdom, refers to this quote:

For it is Yahweh who gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Thus, Yahweh is the ultimate source of true wisdom and the accumulation of wisdom, as the following text from *Proverbs* 2.6-8 declares:

He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,  
Guarding the paths of justice  
And preserving the way of his faithful ones.

It is interesting to note that the concept of the fear of God means ‘obedience, loyalty, worship, sacrifice and love’ towards God (Whybray, 1965, p. 96). In identifying wisdom with the ‘fear’ or ‘reverence’ of Yahweh, Whybray (1965, pp. 95-96) states:

An examination of the use of the verb ‘to fear’  
(*yare*) and the noun ‘fear’ (*yira*) in connexion with  
Yahweh shows that this concept, like that of wisdom,  
was closely associated with education.

Whybray (1965) suggests that the two phrases ‘wisdom’ and ‘fear of Yahweh’ initially represented two distinct types of education in Israel. ‘Wisdom’ signified the teaching of the special wisdom schools in Israel, whereas ‘fear of Yahweh’ meant the ordinary religious education of the people of Israel, which was delivered either by parents or religious authorities.

Although the two systems of education, namely the wisdom schools and everyday religious education in the home, were separate at first, later on, as is apparent from the additions to *Proverbs* 1-9, they were unified. This meant that the schools could assert that ‘the very essence of knowledge—such as formed their traditional curriculum (1.2-5)—is the fear of Yahweh, that is, the practice of the religion of Yahweh in all its aspects’ (Whybray, 1965, p. 98).

In this way, the fear of God is connected with religious instruction; ‘the fear of Yahweh is to be taught and learnt’ (Whybray, 1965, p. 97). This quotation emphasises the close association of Yahweh with wisdom and implies that if

‘wisdom was precious to Yahweh from the beginning of the world, it is impossible to doubt its infinite value to men’ (Whybray, 1965, p. 98).

In his article ‘The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9’, Habel (1972, p. 139) succinctly describes the way of wisdom, as outlined in *Proverbs* 4:7-9, as ‘a total approach to life which promises life in all its fullness’. Habel (1972, p. 139) states that ‘commitment to the way of wisdom inevitably involves an inner appropriation of its life principles. The way and the operations of the way are internalised’, and the goal of this internalisation is establishing one’s ways in society.

Habel (1972) describes the inner truth of wisdom in terms of the two-heart polarity. He explains that the Israelites believed that the heart is the inner self, the mind and the centre of human personality. ‘The inner appropriation of instruction by heart would inevitably effect the integration of the entire person in pursuit of wisdom’ (Habel, 1972, pp. 139-140). Therefore, the admonition of *Proverbs* 4:23, ‘Watch your heart more closely than anything else, for the springs of life issue from it’, becomes significant as it ‘promises a rich measure of life and healing to all who heed the words of wisdom imbedded in their heart’. Thus, the inner potential of the heart becomes a weighty influence on the entire life of a human being. By contrast, the malicious man of *Proverbs* 6:12-15 has a heart that is the dwelling place for upheavals and evil schemes, and is controlled by his seditious plans. However, the wise man is guided by wisdom.

Habel (1972, p. 140) concludes that:

This emphasis on the internalisation of teaching and life highlights the inner human dimensions of personal wisdom as preserved especially in *Proverbs* 4-6. The wise man has an inner compass for the journey of life.

In explaining the ways of Yahwistic religion in the Israelite covenant community in connection with wisdom, Habel (1972, pp. 144-146) explains that although human creativity and intellect are protective powers for travelling the way of wisdom, and they should be given careful attention, 'Human capacities are considered secondary; Yahweh is the actual guardian of the way, walking at the disciple's side, keeping his feet free from entanglements'. In this way, God/Yahweh is the leader of the way and 'a God-fearing heart is the prerequisite for travel'.

Those who are serious about seeking wisdom from Yahweh are enjoined to follow his ways of wisdom and not those of the ordinary individual. In this passage from *Proverbs* 3.5-7, the superiority of divine wisdom over human wisdom is made clear:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And do not rely on your own insight.  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
And he will make straight your paths.  
Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

Referring to Yahwistic reinterpretation of Verses 5-8 in *Proverbs*, Habel (1972, p. 147) concludes that wisdom is:

... [what]...leads to a superior understanding of reverence for Yahweh (v.5).  
Wisdom is ... imparted by Yahweh himself. His messages, oracles, and instructions are the true source of knowledge (v.6); Yahweh, not human ingenuity or competence, protects the disciple of the way (v.7).

The theological understanding of wisdom extends beyond the wisdom that humans discover or receive from Yahweh. Wisdom is viewed as a designing power or presence at work in the universe, a power that Yahweh uses to create the universe.

As *Proverbs* 3.19 reads:

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth,  
By understanding he established the heavens.

This power, or presence that Yahweh uses to design the universe, is personified as ‘Woman Wisdom’. She declares that she was present with God before the creation of the world, as in Habel’s translation (1972, p. 147) of the key passage in *Proverbs* 8.22-23:

Yahweh acquired me first,  
His way before his works,  
From of old, from antiquity I was fashioned,  
From the first, from the beginnings of the Earth.

This passage exalts wisdom to far more than the insights that one may gain from observing nature or society. Wisdom is, in fact, a mysterious impulse or presence at work in creation. This wisdom has been present with Yahweh the Creator from before the beginning of the universe, which possesses an innate wisdom for all to explore, whether through observation as a scientist or through learning in the classroom.

### **Summary**

In the light of this outline, the essential characteristics of wisdom in *Proverbs* can be summarised as follows:

- The ultimate source of wisdom is God (YHWH), who employed wisdom in the construction of the universe and in so doing designed each component with its own ‘way’ or inner reality (see note in Terminology and Definitions re YHWH).
- Human beings acquire wisdom by both learning the truths of reality handed down by the wisdom tradition and by exploring afresh the inner reality of things in the natural world.
- An attitude of awe before God is a valued prerequisite in seeking wisdom.
- Wisdom is more than the knowledge about things; wisdom also involves developing the capacity to distinguish between what effects good or positive outcomes in life, and what

works for evil.

- The human being who possesses wisdom has the capacity to make moral decisions that go beyond a rigid following of religious laws or social mores.

Therefore, the components of wisdom include: knowledge and insight gained by learning the tradition and observing society and nature; the capacity to use the resultant understanding in judgements for good; and recognition that this capacity is ultimately a gift from God.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has continued the analysis of the concept of wisdom from Chapters Three and Four by exploring three theoretical perspectives, each through a representative figure, and all of which reflect points of continuity with the Bahá'í perspective on wisdom and education. The philosophical perspective was discussed through the representative figure of Socrates, the psychological perspective through the representative figure of Sternberg and the religious perspective through the Biblical perspective of *Proverbs*.

In order to further fulfil the aim of this thesis and explore wisdom education in a Bahá'í-inspired school, Chapter Six presents the perspectives of selected Bahá'í authors who have examined the concept of wisdom and its development through education.



## Chapter Six: Bahá'í Perspectives on Education

### Introduction

The analysis of the concept of wisdom in Chapters Three, Four and Five from the various perspectives of philosophy, psychology, religion and Bahá'í has provided an opportunity to deliberate on selected worlds of thought regarding the idea of wisdom, its acquisition, and the role of education in its formation and development. The purpose of the analysis has been to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the role of wisdom in the field of education.

As the focus of this thesis is the role of the Bahá'í-inspired school in facilitating wisdom, the analysis and review also include consideration of selected Bahá'í authors who have examined the concept of wisdom and its development through education. All of these authors explore their understanding of how an educational system should be designed and conducted, based on their understandings of the Bahá'í writings. Some also base their exploration on their experiences in the field of Bahá'í education as administrators, educators, directors and consultants.

In this chapter, the writings of two Bahá'í authors as well as the Australian national Bahá'í education curriculum for Bahá'í children's classes have been selected for exploration, with regard to Bahá'í philosophy, wisdom and education. It should be stated at the outset that although Bahá'í ideas are articulated by these selected Bahá'í authors who have experience in the field of education, the general understanding of the Bahá'ís is that their educational efforts in applying Bahá'í principles to real educational conditions are still emerging as a theory or field of study.

## **Foundational philosophy and practice of present Bahá'í theory of education and wisdom**

Shoghi Effendi (1939b, p. 213) states:

...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, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age.

The primary intention that underlies the Bahá'í approach to education is spiritual empowerment in order to bring about unity. The Bahá'í purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills is to serve humanity, in order to improve not only one's individual economic, social and spiritual conditions but also those of the community.

The contribution of the Bahá'ís, in addition to the theoretical Bahá'í writings on education, is the practical organisational channels that form the administrative order of the Bahá'í Faith. These channels respond to the requirements of the important task of education.

The Bahá'í administrative system, which presently exists in over two hundred and twenty countries and independent territories around the world, channels the Bahá'í community's capacities and skills into service to the world at large. The elected local, regional and national governing councils prepare and approve plans and programmes of activities in consultation with the involved communities. These plans, an important one of which is the concept of education, pertain to different aspects of the Faith and systematically go through the cycle of consultation, action, evaluation and reflection in order to arrive at a more comprehensive plan for future implementation. Working in conjunction with the elected bodies, the appointed arm

of the Bahá'í administrative order comprises a group of learned individuals who function in an advisory capacity. At the international level, the world governing body coordinates the development of the global Bahá'í community.

Thus, the administrative institutions of the Bahá'í Faith coordinate the initiatives of Bahá'ís at large. Members who are elected or appointed to these institutions work on a voluntary basis with no expectation of compensation and with attitudes of humility, sincerity and a deep commitment to the betterment of the world.

The Bahá'í administrative order also presents a format where the concept of consultation is of paramount importance. The decisions made by the elected bodies, informed and advised by the appointed arm, are arrived at through the process of consultation, the outcome of which is greater than the sum total of what the individuals contribute. The dynamic consultation process allows the voice of institutions to be heard rather than the voice of individuals.

The next section explores the concept of consultation in the light of the Bahá'í school system and its contribution to individual as well as collective wisdom.

### **Significance of consultation**

Consultation plays a vital role in Bahá'í education. Whether Bahá'í education is being formulated, administered, understood, implemented, improved or created, consultation forms the basis of these activities. In order to achieve their purpose, it is expected that the indispensable tool of consultation will be used by the institutions of the Faith who commission individuals or committees to develop curriculum, those who develop curriculum, those who implement the curriculum, and finally, the students in the Bahá'í school.

Johnson (1993) gives the example of a Maxwell International Bahá'í School which ensures that each dorm room is as diverse as possible in culture and nationality, and discusses how these cultural differences present spiritual challenges during social interactions and how the students are challenged to confront their feelings when dealing with interpersonal issues. Johnson (1993, p. 2) argues that:

By learning the art of consultation and then applying it in everyday situations, the students begin, out of necessity, to use the spiritual methodology found in the Writings to solve problems and discover truth. This process helps the students to focus on positive responses to problems and realise that there are spiritual principles by which solutions can be found to issues in every situation. The belief is that consultation is 'a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being'.

Beaumaris (1998, p. 3) explains her interpretation of consultation, based on her understanding of the Bahá'í writings. She states that the process of consultation can be described as 'respectful dialogue', during which:

Each individual contributes to the truth as he/she sees it, and out of the clash of opinions, rather than the clash of individuals, the spark of truth will emerge, forming the basis of agreed action, which has emerged from the collective wisdom of the group.

More important is the spirit in which the decision has been reached and carried out:

By carrying out the agreed action in the spirit of unity, it will soon become apparent if the decision was sound or if it needs to be modified or re-thought  
Beaumaris (1998, p. 3).

Beaumaris (1998, p. 3) then goes on to say, 'if this process unleashes a dynamic synergy and is managed effectively, it has the power to re-invigorate, re-envision and inspire a group to action'.

Therefore, the whole process of consultation needs the control of the individual's ego. Once a suggestion has been put forth, it no longer belongs to the individual, thus allowing clashes of 'opinion' to take place in an atmosphere of love, respect and dignity. Some of the qualities considered as a pre-requisite for such a consultation process are purity of motive, detachment, humility, patience, service and radiance of spirit. The control of one's ego allows the human soul to manifest its innate qualities such as detachment, humility and wisdom, and to contribute to the emergence of collective wisdom. Thus, the result of proper consultation is true understanding and enhancement towards the discovery of truth.

Bahá'u'lláh (1978, p. 168) states:

The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh (1998, p. 3) also states that:

Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

One of the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith is that it does not centre on any Bahá'í personality. It is the collective wisdom and the capacity of the institutions that take counsel together that constitute the bedrock of the administrative order of the Faith. Therefore, in order to foster the interests of the Faith, '[i]ndividual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable [should be] supported and

enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group (Shoghi Effendi, 1933b, p. 15).

The world governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, ends one of its messages with the following statements:

May your consultation reach so high a level of endeavour and purpose that the Great One will open before your faces the doors of the paradise of wisdom and love... (Universal House of Justice, 1986, p. 218).

Collective wisdom can be secured through the process of consultation when each individual is connected with their inner spiritual potential, welcoming the promptings of the spiritual forces of the human soul. In this condition there is the possibility of the establishment of divine love, justice and wisdom.

Thus, the development of a Bahá'í system of education occurs through the growth of the administrative structure as it is planned, acted upon, evaluated through consultation and polished to be ready for the next cycle of growth. As the *Foundations for a Spiritual Education* statement (1995, p. 83) indicates, '...the development of a Bahá'í system of education is an evolutionary process, one that will unfold in concert with the development of a truly spiritualised worldwide civilisation'.

Allen (1993, Foreword) argues that the process of developing a Bahá'í perspective on education is as important as the outcome, stating:

If Bahá'í education became instantly available to us without effort and without our participation, it would be a contraction of its own purpose; the training of souls takes place through trial and error."

This view is also taken up by Diehl (1993, p. 49), who states:

The work of exploring what *Bahá'í education* is and then working to integrate this understanding into the development of individuals, families, communities and societies is exciting and truly pioneering work.

In the light of the understanding that a Bahá'í system of education is an evolutionary process, investigated through the instrument of consultation, none of the Bahá'í authors make a claim as individuals to have attained or understood the right, ultimate process. Rather, they see themselves as cooperatively contributing towards the formation of an educational system that would meet humanity's requirements and needs. What is shared by Bahá'ís is that when one functions on a higher level of consciousness about issues and concepts, one is always aware that present conditions can improve, thus welcoming new suggestions and constructive criticism. In this posture of learning, there is no need to fear mistakes or judgement about successes or failures.

### **1. Paul Lample**

The challenge was to find Bahá'í authors who write directly on the concept of wisdom in education. Among these authors, Paul Lample's writings are of interest to this thesis. Lample is known to the Bahá'ís as an author and educator who has served extensively within the Bahá'í administrative order. During the 1990s he served on the National Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the USA. In 1994 he moved to the Bahá'í World Centre to serve as coordinator of the Bahá'í International Office of Social and Economic Development, and was later appointed to the International Teaching Centre in 2003. In 2005, Lample was elected to the Universal House of Justice, the world governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. Hence, he can be considered a well reputed commentator on Bahá'í perspectives of its philosophy and education.

In his book *Creating a New Mind: Reflections on the Individual, the Institutions & the Community*, Lample (1999) explores the Bahá'í writings about individual and collective transformation in order to create a new global civilisation. Lample (1999, p. 4) writes that 'Human reality is bounded by the limits set in the mind .... Change in mind becomes change in deed and change in the world'. Lample believes that a new state of mind is needed when, as individuals, we question ourselves about who we are, where we are, where we are going and what should we do. Regarding the format of his book, Lample (1999, p. 7) writes:

... an attempt is made to explore and correlate some of the salient features of the individual, the institutions, and the community to which we [Bahá'ís] aspire ... each chapter presents a distinct topic for reflection – a modest effort to capture a single capability and examine its various facets.

A particular chapter titled 'The seeker of wisdom' is significant to the interests of this thesis and will be the focus of the following discussion.

#### *A definition of wisdom*

Lample (1999, pp. 16-17) provides a definition of wisdom as that which 'unites knowledge and action; it involves the application of knowledge according to the exigencies of each situation'. He argues that '[i]mplicit in the very concept of wisdom is the proper use of knowledge'.

Lample (1999, p. 16) copiously quotes the writings of Bahá'u'lláh on the concept of wisdom:

'The essence of wisdom' Bahá'u'lláh states, 'is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree.' 'The beginning of Wisdom and the origin thereof ... is to acknowledge whatsoever God hath clearly set forth...'



The embodiment of wisdom is the Manifestation of God—the ‘Divine Physician’ whose ‘task is to foster the well-being of the world and its Peoples.’ Through the teachings of the Manifestation, humanity is enabled to understand reality and to choose the right course of action. ‘He that riseth to serve My Cause should manifest My wisdom,’ Bahá’u’lláh explains, ‘and bend every effort to banish ignorance from the earth.’

*Science and religion as the connection between knowledge and wisdom, and the progress of civilisation*

Wisdom is connected to knowledge and its attainment. As Lample (1999, p. 15) states, from a Bahá’í perspective:

... two sources of knowledge make the progress of civilisation possible: science and religion. Together they enable us to understand ourselves, our environment, our powers and our purpose.

Material and social problems are resolved through the power of science. Indeed, all Bahá’ís are encouraged to acquire various branches of knowledge, and to be active and progressive in the field of inventions and the arts. Above all, Bahá’ís are inspired to acquire scientific and artistic knowledge, and use it to benefit the world of humanity and to contribute to an ever-advancing civilisation. It is also clear in the Bahá’í writings, as Lample (1999, p. 15) points out, that ‘knowledge comes from the teachings of God’.

Lample (1999, p. 16) further explains that:

Religion provides understanding of humanity’s spiritual nature and its implications for personal and collective progress, [and that] beyond the acquisition of knowledge, wisdom is needed, [and the individual who desires to contribute to the development of civilisation] must be a seeker of wisdom.

Wisdom is found in seeking the meaning that resides in knowledge. Hence, Lample (1999, p. 17) maintains that '[t]he individual who aspires to wisdom is continually seeking orientation from the twin knowledge systems of religion and science'.

Lample (1999, p. 17) believes that:

Throughout history, humanity has repeatedly fallen into the pitfalls of superstition and fanaticism on one hand, and materialism and moral relativism on the other. The complementary truths of these two systems make it possible to avoid these dangers.

In explaining how science and religion contribute to wisdom, Lample (1999, pp. 17-18) believes it is important to differentiate between Divine Revelation from religious beliefs, true religion and religious traditions, and true science and biased materialism.

#### *Divine Revelation and religious beliefs*

Lample (1999) explains that Divine Revelation is the supreme standard for understanding everything, as all knowledge and wisdom come from God. Lample (1999, p. 17) suggests that Divine Revelation

... is the repository of the pure teachings of God. It is the supreme standard for understanding all things, since it is the expression of divine wisdom which encompasses the knowledge of all reality. Human beings cannot judge the descriptive or prescriptive truths of Revelation.

Therefore, since human understanding of the divine standard is limited, the risk is that religion can degenerate into superstition. Preventing this requires the religious beliefs about the meaning of Revelation – as opposed to Revelation itself – to be weighed in the light of scientific truth and reason.

Lample (1999) suggests that there is a fundamental difference between Divine

Revelation itself and the understanding that believers have of it. The reason for this difference is that human understanding is limited; where there is limitation there is the possibility of error; and where there is error conflicts can arise. Therefore, conflicts arise when Divine Revelation is interpreted by different groups in their own unique way and considered as firm religious belief. One way of facilitating our understanding of the difference between Divine Revelation and the understanding believers have of it is through the example of a basic distinction between scientific fact and reasoning on the one hand, and scientists' conclusions or theories on the other.

*True religion and religious traditions*

In situations of conflict about the interpretation of Sacred Scriptures, the attribute of intellectual humility becomes of paramount importance, as the seeker should accept the fact that some problems may defy his/her understanding at that particular time and he/she should approach the subject with the consideration that he/she could be wrong. Unity and agreement are impossible if religious belief is professed blindly and without investigation. As Lample (1999, p. 17) asserts:

When religion as a knowledge system is in conformity with Revelation, and not tainted by vain imaginings, then it is true religion. It protects the believer from arrogance and conceit that turn knowledge into a grievous veil between the individual and God... True religion illuminates human understanding, helping to separate science from dogmatic materialism.

A look at religious traditions reveals that they are the report and record of understanding and interpretation of the sacred scriptures. Human reason or human mind, which is finite and faulty, has reached these interpretations and

understandings. Human reason or intellect finds itself incapable of explaining many questions, or one human intellect contradicts another in interpreting traditions.

#### *True science and biased materialism*

From a Bahá'í perspective, true science is reason and reality. It facilitates one's power of reasoning to discover the realities of things. True science has contributed to humanity's understanding of the oneness of the universe and the interdependence of its parts. Dogmatic materialism, on the other hand, insists that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately understood only through the use of an academic methodology. Dogmatic materialism manifests itself in the form of attachment to worldly things, the fear and anxieties that distract the mind, the instant pleasures that fill the time, and the class, creed and gender prejudices that prevent justice.

Lample (1999, pp. 18-19) concludes that '[a]cquiring knowledge and wisdom through the study of sciences and the divine teachings is an endeavour in which all Bahá'ís can engage to the best of their ability', valuing the efforts of those who seek knowledge and wisdom since they contribute to their own transformation and the transformation of society.

#### *Exploring challenges in relation to facilitation of wisdom in schools*

Lample (1999) maintains that if one wants to transform oneself and society for the better, one needs to be a wisdom seeker. The connection of wisdom to the progress of oneself and the role one plays in helping to transform society lies in acquiring knowledge from both religious and scientific sources. The balance between faith and reason then allows one to properly apply the knowledge gained in each situation in such a way that it will benefit the world of humanity.

Lample (1999) appears to use the concept of wisdom in three related ways:

- a) Wisdom resides in knowledge, and stimuli must be used for the student to explore and find the wisdom imbedded in that knowledge
- b) Wisdom, like knowledge, can be acquired by studying both the sciences and divine teachings
- c) Wisdom is the application of knowledge to real life situations.

So, according to Lample (1999), education would appear to involve the study of both the sciences and divine teachings in order to discover the knowledge/wisdom in them and the activity of applying that knowledge/wisdom to a living situation.

From the above, we observe that Lample does not explicitly deal with the concept of wisdom as an innate capacity in a human being that can be nurtured, but rather as something located within the sciences and divine teachings. He also speaks of wisdom as a highly developed skill that is applied at an appropriate time according to the requirements of the situation. Wisdom is expressed as the proper use of knowledge rather than a concept that has been revealed. It is innate in the individual. Lample's (1999) definition of wisdom is closer to the concept of wisdom as having tact and considering the requirements of the situation, such as appropriate timing, use of speech, observing moderation and behaving in a certain manner so that the result contributes to the building of unity.

Based on Lample's (1999) explanation, in order for a school to facilitate wisdom it is necessary to offer both scientific subjects and spiritual subjects, enabling the student not only to gain knowledge about maths, physics, chemistry and other sciences but also to learn how to apply that knowledge in service to the world of humanity.

Although Lample does not talk explicitly about the content of school curricula, I would deduce from his writings that the need for balance between religious and

scientific knowledge acquisition requires the Bahá'í schools or Bahá'í-inspired schools to create an environment where both religious and academic studies are undertaken.

Based on the premise that acquisition of knowledge/wisdom should be from both sources of religion and science in order to transform oneself and society, the challenging questions are:

- Do the Bahá'í-inspired schools perceive wisdom (as per Lample) as relevant knowledge found in the sciences and divine teachings, which is then applied to real life situations, or is their perception of wisdom different?
- What processes do schools employ to enable the wisdom inherent in the sciences and divine teachings to be discerned by students?

## **2. Farzam Arbab**

Farzam Arbab is an educator and physicist whose interest in rural development led him to study the relationship of science, technology and educational policy to problems of development. In 1974 he joined with a group of colleagues to create Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (FUNDAEC). FUNDAEC remains a notably successful development programme in Colombia today, having earned an international reputation for its approach to the application of spiritual principles in education and development. He also served as the first director of the Latin American Centre for Rural Technology and Education (CELATER) until 1988 when he was appointed to the Bahá'í International Teaching Centre and transferred his residence to Israel. In 1989 Arbab received an honorary doctorate in science from Amherst College in recognition of his accomplishments in the development field. In 1993 he was elected to the Universal House of Justice. He presently lives in Haifa and serves as a member of that Body.

### *Arbab's lectures on Bahá'í-inspired curricula*

In a series of six lectures, Arbab (1994) defines Bahá'í-inspired curricula, shares some examples of curricular elements, discusses the nature of some of the objectives of Bahá'í-inspired curricula and expresses their close connection with each other. In this series of lectures, Arbab's purpose is to gain insights into the nature of some of the curricula's objectives, such as fostering understanding, imparting information, and assisting with the development of attitudes, spiritual qualities, skills and abilities, as well as into the concepts of capabilities and integration.

Arbab (1994, p. 1) defines Bahá'í-inspired curricula as:

... curricula that reflect Bahá'í ideals and operates within the framework of Bahá'í principles, but which are not intended to impart knowledge about the Faith as a religion. Such curricula may address any branch of knowledge or academic discipline, while at the same time paying attention to the implications of Bahá'í teachings for the subject matter.

Every idea in the development of materials, however, is weighed carefully in the balance of the Bahá'í writings. Arbab (1994, p. 11) further explains that 'the enhancement of understanding is a fundamental objective of Bahá'í-inspired curricula', after claiming that according to the Bahá'í writings, the most basic concern of any educational endeavour has to be the development of the gift of understanding:

No matter how wise the range of practical and social skills we may wish to help our students develop, no matter how much emphasis we place on the all-important matter of the acquisition of virtues, no matter how much we prepare them for the assimilation of facts in an age of information explosion, we will not be educating anyone if we do not somehow help our students develop the gift of understanding (Arbab, 1994, p. 5).

According to Arbab (1994, p. 5), quoting the Bahá'í writings, the development of the gift of understanding is of paramount importance, as:

... [the] purpose in conferring such a gift is none other except to enable His creature to know and recognise the one true God – exalted be His glory. This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation.

Relevant to the focus of this thesis is Arbab's (1994, pp. 23-24) explanation of the subject of the verb 'to understand', which he calls the 'human soul'. He asserts that:

In the Bahá'í view the reality of man is his soul and the soul has no material existence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that mental faculties are "inherent properties of the soul, even as the radiation of light is the essential property of the sun". "The rays of the sun", He further explains, "are renewed but the sun itself is ever the same and unchanged. Consider how the human intellect develops and weakens, and may at times come to naught, whereas the soul changeth not. For the mind to manifest itself, the human body must be whole; and a sound mind cannot be but in a sound body, whereas the soul dependeth not upon the body. It is through the power of the soul that the mind comprehendeth, imagineth and exerteth its influence, whilst the soul is a power that is free. The mind comprehendeth the abstract by the aid of the concrete, but the soul hath limitless manifestations of its own. The mind is circumscribed, the soul limitless. It is by the aid of such senses as those of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, that the mind comprehendeth, whereas, the soul is free from all agencies. The soul as thou observest, whether it be in sleep or waking, is in motion and ever active. Possibly it may, whilst in a dream, unravel an intricate problem, incapable of solution in the waking state. The mind, moreover, understandeth not whilst the senses have ceased to function, and in the embryonic stage and in early infancy the reasoning power is totally absent, whereas the soul is ever endowed with full strength" (Arbab, 1994, pp. 23-24).

Thus, Arbab (1994, p. 25) claims that:



... an educational process cognisant of the spiritual nature of man cannot merely be concerned with the capacity of the human brain, which nowadays serves as the only definition of intelligence.

He goes on to discuss how the most fundamental objectives of Bahá'í-inspired curricula are the sharpening of the faculties of the human soul, acknowledging that materialistic education is not totally oblivious to these challenges as it emphasises motivation as a requisite of learning, which represents a search for opening the channels of the human spirit; the spirit of faith and the Holy Spirit from which the powers can flow. However, Arbab (1994, p. 25) sees the problem as 'having reduced everything, explicitly or implicitly, to interactions between material entities', causing individuals to seek only sources of motivation either externally, in social and economic achievements, or internally, in ill-defined notions such as self-image and self-satisfaction. Arbab (1994, p. 25) goes on to explain how:

... important as some of these may be in any specific situation, what really motivates a person to learn is illumination from the realm of the spirit that touches and excites human intelligence, defined more broadly as the collective capacity of a number of interacting faculties of the soul.

One of the suggestions Arbab (1994, p. 26) makes with regard to the question of how an educational process sharpens the faculties of the human soul is the power of attraction to beauty. He claims that this power motivates human beings as well as existence. A Bahá'í-inspired curriculum needs to strive to awaken this power within the student's soul. Arbab (1994, p. 26) explains that once children are exposed to true beauty from early childhood, later on 'they will refuse to buy the ugliness that a blind society sells in the name of beauty'. He goes on to explain that:

Appreciation of beauty is not a matter that is confined to a specific academic subject. It must be addressed in all subjects, but especially in the arts, the sciences, and language (Arbab, 1994, p. 26).

With regard to the effect of being attracted to beauty, Arbab (1994) states that the student's inner or spiritual eye is opened and as the vision of the inner eye is sharpened, the capacity to understand is actually increased, thereby creating intelligence.

Another suggestion Arbab (1994, pp. 29-31) puts forth with regard to fostering understanding is that when educationalists consider the whole human being as not only a physical entity but also a spiritual one, then progress of understanding can be made not only from understanding the concrete to understanding the abstract, but also as a parallel progression that goes from the abstract to the concrete. Arbab (1994, p. 29) acknowledges that the capacity to understand increases as an individual goes through the various stages of growth from infancy to adulthood. He also recognises that a lot of valuable research has been carried out in psychology and education on the development of learning capacity as physical growth occurs, taking into account the inherent capacity of the child and how to teach something to a child. Arbab (1994, p. 30) refers to research on stages of learning and how experiments are carried out to gauge a child's capacity to grasp a certain concept. The essence of any method employed would involve '... applying educational stimuli to various groups and somehow measuring and comparing their learning', taking into account not only pedagogical factors but also cultural and social factors.

However, Arbab (1994, p. 30) notes that in order to be able to know if, at a certain age, a child is or is not capable of learning a thing, the paradigm within which the

experiments are carried out has to be taken into account. If the paradigm is the extreme materialistic one, then the researchers would be thinking only of directing stimuli at the various functions of the brain they recognise, such as memory, cognition and emotions. Consequently, the conclusions they would reach would only apply to one channel of learning, 'the one that comes through the physical senses'.

What Arbab (1994, p. 30) is suggesting is that if the researchers consider all channels of the human being, they will direct educational stimuli towards other powers and faculties of the soul as well, which are described in the Bahá'í writings as the 'inner eye, the inner ear, the heart, the spirit of faith...'. Hence, the researchers' conclusions would be suitable for tapping into the spiritual powers of a child at a given age.

Arbab (1994, pp. 30-31) gives the example of four-year-old Bahá'í children who memorise the well-known passage from the Bahá'í writings about unity, and actually understand the abstract concept of unity at that tender age:

The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.

Arbab (1994, p. 31) claims, however, that although the four-year-old's understanding of the concept of unity 'is not as developed as a fifteen year old's; nevertheless understanding it is'. Thus, he proposes considering the whole individual, where the enhancement of understanding goes not only from the concrete to the abstract but also from the abstract to the concrete.

### *Exploring challenges in relation to facilitation of wisdom in schools*

Arbab appears to use the concept of understanding in five related ways:

- 1) The capacity of understanding is a God-given gift.
- 2) The purpose of the gift of understanding is to be able to know and worship God.
- 3) The capacity of understanding is innate and needs to be developed in education.

- 4) The gift of understanding can be developed through the sharpening of the human soul's faculties.
- 5) The cause of motivation for a person to understand better is to be illumined from the realm of the spirit.

Therefore, according to Arbab, education would appear to involve the nurturing and enhancement of one's gift of understanding by sharpening the faculties of the human soul and understanding the natural yearnings of that soul.

According to Arbab's (1994) lectures, human beings are essentially spiritual beings. Spirituality arises from knowing and worshipping God, and is an inner condition that should manifest itself in action. Enhancement of an individual's understanding assists spirituality to manifest itself in action by imbuing one's action with the spirit of service.

In light of Arbab's explanation of Bahá'í-inspired curricula, the questions posed for reflection are:

- Do Bahá'í-inspired schools perceive the capacity of understanding as a relevant concept to be developed or is their perception of the gift of understanding different?
- What processes do schools employ to enable the gift of understanding inherent in the human soul to be discerned by students?
- Is wisdom the understanding that happens when the soul is illumined?

### **3. National Bahá'í Education Curriculum of Australia**

The National Bahá'í Education Curriculum is a guide for parents and teachers, based on aims and objectives formulated nationwide by parents, educators, teachers and interested Bahá'ís. This curriculum is the result of consultation among many national and international Bahá'ís. The curriculum was trialed widely in the Australian community, modified and submitted to other national education committees in

Alaska, Canada, the USA, Hawaii, New Zealand and the United Kingdom for criticism. The proposed changes were built into the curriculum.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Australia (Children's Education Task Force, 1992) acknowledges that the Australian community is not the same everywhere and thus encourages the parents, teachers and the students themselves to modify objectives to serve the different cultural perspectives of the diverse groups. They explain that the spirit of the curriculum comes from the *Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh*; '... its mind and heart depend on the thinking and lovingness of the people using it' (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol. 1, Preface). The education of children is not seen as an isolated event, but, like life itself, it is a process which is lived within the Bahá'í teachings.

The curriculum structure is explained through the analogy of a woven fabric that is built up over time:

Just as a woven fabric has a warp and a weft, so does the curriculum. The warp is made up of the aims of all the themes. The weft is made up of the experiences the children have in achieving the objectives of each unit (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol. 1, p. 13).

The overall aim of this Bahá'í curriculum is 'to know, love and worship God'.

The warp of the curriculum consists of the following thirteen themes and aims:

- 1) Theme: Love Bahá'u'lláh  
Aim: Love Bahá'u'lláh, joyfully accept His Teachings and Laws in living the Bahá'í life.
- 2) Theme: God's Plan  
Aim: Accept progressive revelation as God's plan for the advancement of humanity.
- 3) Theme: Transformation  
Aim: Realise potential as a developing person.
- 4) Theme: Purpose of Religion

- Aim: Experience religion as a unifying force within self and society.
- 5) Theme: Unity in Diversity  
Aim: Welcome people of different racial, national, religious and cultural backgrounds.
  - 6) Theme: Laws of Life  
Aim: Investigate reality with increasing wonder at the infinite variety of life, and respect for the laws of life.
  - 7) Theme: The Beauty of Life  
Aim: Be increasingly aware of the beauty, unity and interdependence of all things.
  - 8) Theme: Making Decisions  
Aim: Become increasingly responsible for making decisions.
  - 9) Theme: Family Life  
Aim: Develop those values, qualities and skills that contribute to family life.
  - 10) Theme: Consultation  
Aim: Communicate honestly with other people and develop the skills of consultation.
  - 11) Theme: Bahá'í History  
Aim: Understand and appreciate the history and characteristics of Bahá'í society.
  - 12) Theme: A New World Order  
Aim: Work to achieve a new world civilisation.
  - 13) Theme: Living the Life  
Aim: Contribute personal abilities, special talents and work for the welfare of others.

The weft consists of the objectives of each unit and the experiences associated with them. When the weft is added to the warp the cloth is woven through the support of these two elements.

The spiral curriculum has four levels for each aim and theme. The students complete the units in each theme four times; once during early childhood (about 3-6 years), then through their younger years (about 5-9 years), followed by their older years (about 8-12 years), and later again when they are youths (about 11 upwards). Each time the students return to a theme, they will study it in greater depth, and increase their knowledge and understanding of the theme.

An important point to note is the flexibility of the curriculum as parents and educators meet the challenges the students present during their development. The order of working through the objectives is flexible and so is the time spent on each unit. In adapting the curriculum for each child, for example, the teacher can start with theme 3 before theme 1. The curriculum welcomes the input of the students themselves, and the parents, teachers, and others who are interested in making contributions. Each unit has four pages consisting of an overview, sample activities, follow-up and follow-up continued.

The National Bahá'í Education Curriculum understands education to be 'a continuing process with a capacity for integrating and enriching the whole of community life. It is a necessary prerequisite for citizenship in a global society' (Children's Education Task Force, 1993, vol. 2, Preface). It also acknowledges that the Bahá'ís are at the very beginning stages in their understanding of what a Bahá'í curriculum will look like. However, the approaches they advocate reflect 'principles inherent in the notion that education is a process of bringing forth divine virtue from each person who is in reality a "mine rich in gems of inestimable value"' (Children's Education Task Force, 1998, vol. 3, Preface). As we progress through this process, the curriculum acknowledges the understanding that:

The teacher is no longer seen as the font of all knowledge, under whose direction students are filled to the brim. Rather, the teacher, through, experiential, collaborative approaches facilitates learning thereby enabling students to develop the necessary knowledge, understandings and skills to independently investigate the truth (Children's Education Task Force, 1998, vol. 3, Preface).

The curriculum asserts that the relationship between the teacher and the children should be that of radiating love. The whole atmosphere of a class or school should

radiate with the love of God and the teacher should be spiritually alive. As quoted from the Bahá'í writings, 'The teacher when teaching, must be himself fully enkindled, so that his utterance, like unto a flame of fire, may exert influence and consume the veil of self' (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol.1, p 38). The atmosphere of the classes should be conducive to making lifetime friendships, a place where there is compassion, love and happiness, a place which allows the whole community to work together for a common goal. One of the ways recommended to achieve a loving atmosphere is to share prayers and meditations. Educators are requested to praise and encourage children's involvement in meaningful and positive activities, and to discourage disruptive behaviour and poor standards. The curriculum quotes from the Bahá'í writings, which state that a school is understood as a place of 'utmost discipline and order'; a place where 'provision must be made for the rectification and refinement of character' (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol.1, p. 41).

The curriculum makes a distinction between training and education. Training is seen as an essential part of education. There needs to be effective training so that the benefits of education are realised. The whole community has the responsibility of training children to be respectful, obedient, trustworthy and honest. This can be achieved when children see and experience these attributes in the adults around them and in other children. Education, on the other hand, 'arises from motivations within the individual leading to fulfilment as a person and to contributions to society' (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol.1, p. 44). As with training, education is a process that starts from infancy and goes on throughout one's life. Children can be motivated and stimulated by teachers, parents and the Creative Word of God. This can be seen as an intertwined spiritual process.



The curriculum stresses a child development-centred community in which adults are conscious that they are role models to the children through their behaviours and in which the young are respected, listened to and included in the life of the community. In such an environment the teacher is held in very high esteem, particularly a teacher who facilitates the children's spiritual learning. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

You are educating your spiritual children.... The spiritual father is greater than the physical one, for the latter bestoweth this world's life, whereas the former endoweth his child with life everlasting. This is why in the Law of God, teachers are listed among the heirs (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol.1, p. 47).

The curriculum perceives teachers as a vital link between young people and God.

The learning environment in this curriculum's perspective can be the community, the home, the world or the universe. The physical place of a classroom can be the beach, the mountain, a lounge room, a garden, a rainforest or a desert. It can be as simple as an empty tent or as elaborate as possible, with fully up-to-date gadgets. What is important is that any chosen spot should radiate love and it can radiate love when God is remembered and mentioned. The learning environment is enriched when learning experiences occur between children, and/or between children and the teacher, and/or between a child and the study materials. These interactions may involve reading, observing, reflecting, memorising, analysing, creating, solving problems, experimenting, role playing, dancing, discussions, community services and field trips. The teacher is encouraged to use a variety of methods to enhance the children's understanding of the concepts. The teachers are also recommended to encourage the students to express their understanding through creative ways of their own, whether it be song writing, role playing, dancing, poems, arts and crafts, or others.

Teaching is seen as an ‘opportunity to share learning with children’ (Children’s Education Task Force, 1992, vol.1, p. 59), which spreads happiness and joy.

*An example of some of the contents of one of the themes: Transformation*

The aim of this theme is to realise potential as a developing person. There are different objectives mentioned for the early childhood level, younger children level, older children level and youth level. This section explores the objectives and some learning examples of the youth level.

#### Objectives of the Youth level

- Expand capacity for intellectual, emotional, artistic and physical development.

Focus questions under this objective for exploration are:

- 1) What is our responsibility to the Covenant?
- 2) Is there a limit to the perfections of man?
- 3) How do we prepare ourselves for helping to carry forward an ever advancing civilisation?
- 4) What is the purpose and power of meditation?

In the sample activities section, one part is dedicated to ‘Meditation’. Under this heading, the following quotation is featured:

Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God’s mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition (Children’s Education Task Force, 1993, vol.2, p. 85).

- Be aware of those things that lead to loftiness and those that lead to abasement.

Focus questions under this objective for exploration are:

- 1) How can I know myself?
- 2) What is a Bahá’í?
- 3) How can I live a Bahá’í life?
- 4) Who will help me?

In the ‘helpful information for the busy teacher’ section, the following quote from the writings of ‘Abdu’I-Bahá is shared:

I desire distinction for you. The Bahá’ís must be distinguished from others of humanity. But this distinction must not depend upon wealth ... that they should become more affluent than other people. I do not desire for you financial distinction. It is not an ordinary distinction I desire; not scientific, commercial, industrial distinction. For you I desire spiritual distinction; that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity; for unity and concord; for love and justice ... for firmness and steadfastness; for philanthropic deeds ad service to the human world; for love toward every human being; for unity and accord with all people; for removing prejudices and promoting international peace. Finally, you must become distinguished for heavenly illumination and acquiring the bestowals of God. I desire this distinction for you. This must be the point of distinction among you. (Children’s Education Task Force, 1993, vol.2, p. 91).

- Apply Bahá’í moral values to one’s personal life.

Focus questions under this objective for exploration are:

- 1) What is meant by a new race of men?
- 2) Why should I fear God?
- 3) What are the moral values we apply in our lives?
- 4) What is ‘moderation’?

Under the ‘Teacher Development’ section, the following words are shared:

Unless the theme of the fear of God has been taught from the mother’s knee, this will be a challenging concept. It is difficult to understand why we should fear God, our Creator, the One who loves us. However, Bahá’u’lláh gives us ample advice and warning, and the students should be directed to the references that can satisfy their wonder ... consider also, what happens to the meaning when ‘fear’ is used in the sense of ‘reverence’ and ‘awe’. Neither of these words imply ‘drawing away from’ but ‘being drawn towards God’ Who is infinitely greater than His created ones and Who

inspires wonder and reverence (Children's Education Task Force, 1993, vol.2, p. 92).

- Participate in the spiritual life of the community – set personal goals.

Focus questions under these objectives for exploration are:

- 1) In what way does our involvement enhance the spiritual life of the community?
- 2) Do we benefit from community involvement?
- 3) How can goal setting assist us in our service to humanity?
- 4) Does service to humanity help a person realise his/her potential?

In the 'worksheet' section, the following quotation from *The Promise of World Peace*, a statement of the Universal House of Justice (Children's Education Task Force, 1993, vol. 2, p. 101) is shared in order to explore how the youth can serve the cause of peace:

The Bahá'í community is an example of an irresistible spirit of unity. It is a worldwide community, drawing its members from every religious and racial background, from all nations and classes. It is united in service to the rest of humanity and conducts its affairs through the process of consultation. The Universal House of Justice humbly offers the Bahá'í experience as a model for study as mankind strives to obtain its maturity.

## **Exploring challenges in relation to facilitation of wisdom in schools**

Although the National Bahá'í Education Curriculum of Australia does not talk directly about wisdom, one may conclude that based on the curriculum's overall aim, which is to love and worship God, there is a connection with the concept of wisdom. In this respect, all thirteen aims suggest a connection with the concept of wisdom as it has been defined in the conceptual framework above. The curriculum indicates that education 'arises from motivations within the individual' (Children's Education Task Force, 1992, vol.1, p. 44). This view is parallel to the innateness of the concept of

wisdom. Moreover, the curriculum stipulates that students can be motivated not only by teachers and parents but more importantly through the Creative Word of God. Similarly, the conceptual framework suggests a direct connection with the influence of the Creative Word of God and innate wisdom.

The spiral curriculum, which allows the students to learn the themes in greater depth and increase their knowledge and understanding of those themes, assists the children in grasping and integrating the overall aim in their lives. The flexible nature of the curriculum in terms of the order of presentation of the themes and, more importantly, the acceptance of input from students and parents, helps to motivate the children's inner capacity and stimulate wisdom.

The definition of education in this curriculum is yet another source of motivating the capacity within, as education is seen as a lifelong process that builds the capacity to enrich the whole community by preparing students for global citizenship. The recognition of each student's nobility and the process of bringing forth the divine gems from within each motivates and enables students to gain the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to investigate the truth about any matter independently and stimulate the capacity within.

From the curriculum's perspective, both training and education are motivated by teachers' role-modeling. Bahá'í parents and communities hold these teachers in very high esteem as links between God and young people. Teachers stimulate children's inner capacity for wisdom through the creative Word of God.

Hence, according to the National Bahá'í Education Curriculum, education is a continuing process of 'bringing forth divine virtues from each person' (Children's Education Task Force, 1998, vol.3, Preface), which refers to the innate goodness of

each individual, similar to the concept of wisdom. The curriculum talks about the process of education as experience, love, worship, role models and the Word of God. However, it does not talk about wisdom directly.

Based on the National Bahá'í Education Curriculum, the following questions are posed for reflection:

- 1) Is it clear that the task of educators is more than training and that it involves stimulating innate wisdom?
- 2) Do Bahá'í children's classes or Bahá'í schools consciously develop curriculum teachings to stimulate the inner capacity or wisdom?

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the foundational philosophy and practice of present Bahá'í theory of education and wisdom through the perspective of selected Bahá'í authors. It has explored the writings of two Bahá'í authors/educationalists' understandings of the Bahá'í philosophy, wisdom and education in theory, and used The Australian National Bahá'í Education Curriculum to provide further insight into the practice of wisdom education within the Australian Bahá'í communities and in service to the public. Other Bahá'ís active in the education field provided insights into one of the significant spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith, namely *consultation*, and the vital role it plays in wisdom education.

Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six, provide a conceptual framework for the analysis of the data in Chapters Seven and Eight.

## **Chapter Seven: The Concepts of Wisdom Gleaned from Interviews at a Bahá'í-inspired School**

### **Introduction**

The following two chapters focus on reporting, analysis and interpretation of the findings from the data gleaned from participant observation, interviews and document/curriculum analysis at a Bahá'í-inspired school. Each chapter has its own research focus.

- 1) The focus of Chapter Seven is the analysis and classification of the data derived from the questions 'what is wisdom?' and 'what are its components according to the students and staff of NCCI?'
- 2) The focus of Chapter Eight is the analysis and classification of how wisdom is acquired in theory, as well as how a Bahá'í-inspired school addresses this issue in practical terms, according to the same participants and the findings from Chapter Seven.

In each of these chapters (i) the data from the interview transcripts is reported and a sample of quotations is shared in Appendix One and Appendix Two; (ii) these findings are then interpreted and synthesised into sub-categories; and finally, (iii) these sub-categories are compared with the conceptual framework reported earlier.

The data consisted of interviews with the founder, principal, vice-principal, staff, students and some former staff and students of Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute (NCCI) in Stratford, Canada, as well as participant observation and document/curriculum analysis. The interviews were carried out on site at the school for a period of six weeks during which time positive relationships were established with the participants, observations of their routine were noted and videos were taken for future reference. The interviews were informed by the researcher's observation of

all participants during classes, staff meetings, school meetings, residential stays, excursions, morning assemblies, behavioural management committees, daily dining with participants and, in summary, the totality of the participants' everyday life at school. Furthermore, relevant documents such as the principal's master thesis on moral leadership at NCCI, the document on the school's philosophy consisting of *19 Moral Capabilities*, the school information package, students' calendar and outline of courses were collated and studied during the six-week period.

The next step was to peruse the collected data to formulate concepts. The concepts formulated were based on the responses to the interview questions:

- 1) What is wisdom?
- 2) What are the components of wisdom?

The formulation of the concepts was an evolving process that required perusal of the data several times in order to capture not only the qualitative essence of the ideas expressed but also to cover all the ideas articulated.

As a result of this process, two sets of sub-categories emerged that corresponded with the two research questions. Although the analysis endeavoured to capture the responses to the two different research questions, and to treat the questions separately, it should be noted that the answers to the two overlap because often the participant did not focus on the particular question asked.

The first set of sub-categories that emerged (Appendix One, Table 1) in response to the first research question, 'what is wisdom?', consisted of:

- 1a) moral discernment/justice*
- 1b) capacity to think and reflect*
- 1c) knowledge*
- 1d) spiritual awareness*



- 1e) understanding of the world*
- 1f) the ability to make decisions.*

Sub-category 1a), *moral discernment/justice*, is about one's insight into the implications of one's behaviour on others in order to create justice and peace.

Sub-category 1b), *capacity to think and reflect*, encompasses exploration of the deeper meaning of concepts, a process that involves activating the innate wisdom within the person

Sub-category 1c), *knowledge*, stresses the importance of acquisition of all knowledge – both material and spiritual – and its application for the benefit of others.

Sub-category 1d), *spiritual awareness*, is about being aware of the presence of God, having an understanding of spiritual matters and recognising one's innate goodness.

Sub-category 1e), *understanding of the world*, is about having adequate understanding and experience of the world to be able to make the right choice in one's life and advise others positively.

Sub-category 1f), *the ability to make decisions*, is about the ability to make decisions in all situations, based on one's knowledge and experience, which would be conducive to justice and unity.

The second set of sub-categories (Appendix Two, Table 2) that emerged in response to the research question, 'what are the components of wisdom?', consisted of:

- 2a) moral action*
- 2b) other focused*
- 2c) critical reflection*
- 2d) enquiry oriented.*

Sub-category 2a), *moral action*, is about wise actions based on both material and spiritual knowledge and experience that are conducive to creating justice and equity.

Sub-category 2b), *other focused*, is about the capacity to be selfless, believing in the Oneness of Humanity and developing the capacity to genuinely serve other people's needs.

Sub-category 2c), *critical reflection*, is about the ability to reflect and meditate on situations with detachment from self-interest that would allow one to learn from former experiences and make better future decisions.

Sub-category 2d), *enquiry oriented*, is about having an open mind that is susceptible to investigation of matters.

### **Concepts of wisdom generated from the data**

The present chapter reflects wisdom found in interviews with the founder, principal, vice-principal, staff and students of the school. Two tables of quotations from the data (see Appendix Two, Tables 1 & 2) have been formulated on the meaning and components of wisdom. It should be noted that the quotations in the tables are participants' representative statements used to illustrate their understanding of the elements of wisdom.

In the following discussion, sub-categories are indicated in italics for easy reference.

### **Participants' conceptions of the meaning of wisdom**

What follows is a synthesis of the participants' responses to the interview question 'what is wisdom?'. The participants have been put into three groups: a) the leadership group, comprising the founder, principal and the vice principal who are

the leaders of the school and provide the vision; b) the staff group, comprising staff who provide context and operationalise the leadership's vision; and c) the student group, comprising students who provide insight into the impact of wisdom education, and whose values and concepts are the product of the school.

- **Leadership group**

The founder of the school referred to the meaning of wisdom as primarily a concept associated with *moral discernment and justice*. He referred to the spiritual principles that are at work in the universe and the need for human beings to be always aware of these, and to try and apply them as expressions of justice in one's daily life.

However, in his remarks, he stated that wisdom also has to do with the acquisition of knowledge of this world:

*Wisdom has to do with becoming as knowledgeable as you can be about virtues, qualities and capabilities as well as arts and sciences and apply it and make it manifest in this world.*

In other words, the acquisition of virtues enables one to act with moral discernment and justice. It enables one to balance one's thoughts or views, and to act on moral choices that result in justice.

Furthermore, he explained that the degree of individual and social progress is dependent upon the conceptualisation of spiritual knowledge, and the application of that knowledge, as well as of the arts and sciences, to this world. The founder's reference to the word 'manifestation' of wisdom in this world implies a concept of wisdom as being innate in every human being and yet it needs to be made manifest:

*Wisdom does not happen to adults at a certain age; I think wisdom begins when the child is in the womb.*

The principal's and the vice-principal's conceptions of wisdom are associated with *spiritual awareness*. They stressed that wisdom is associated with knowing 'about my potential nobility'. It should be clarified here that in Bahá'í terminology, the word 'nobility', with reference to human beings, emanates from a worldview that there is innate goodness within each individual and the latent potential to be spiritually upright in one's affairs. Human beings are discerned as good individuals whose potential for goodness needs to be released through education. Wisdom, therefore, also becomes associated with discerning the purpose of one's life in this world, particularly that of service to humanity. The principal and the vice-principal conceptualised wisdom as 'spiritual in nature', meaning that a wise person would constantly be aware of the presence of God and the need to allow God to direct his/her life.

- **Staff**

The staff of NCCI disclosed conceptions of wisdom in many different ways that included the sub-categories of *moral discernment*, *capacity to think and reflect*, *knowledge*, *understanding of the world* and *ability to make decisions*. Under the sub-category of *moral discernment*, wisdom is referred to as the ability 'to judge between right and wrong'. This indicates the belief that wisdom is associated with the concept of justice and an individual's moral actions. Some staff also associated wisdom with 'having experience and understanding to respond to something in a way that reflects the highest self'. The concept of the highest self seems similar to the concept of potential nobility within each individual. The staff definition of wisdom as 'being close to the truth' and the 'acquisition of knowledge, spiritual knowledge or spiritual truths, and applying it to one's life so that it will profit both oneself and others' is

similar to the founder's definition of wisdom as being both academic and spiritual knowledge, and utilising them to serve humanity.

Some staff also referred to wisdom as having an *understanding of the world* in the context of having the ability to make decisions from one's experiences and being able to articulate the outcome of those decisions in the world. They also perceived wisdom as an understanding that comes from 'balance between the intellect, emotion, interpersonal and social aspects'. Staff associated the capability to understand the world with having the ability to make decisions. Wisdom was also referred to as the *ability to make decisions* that can bring 'harmony to all' and where justice plays an important role. Interviewed staff did not directly talk about wisdom in relation to *spiritual awareness*.

- **Students**

The students' conceptions of wisdom included the *capacity to think and reflect*, *knowledge*, *spiritual awareness*, *understanding of the world* and the *ability to make decisions*. They did not talk directly about wisdom in relation to *moral discernment and justice*, but described wisdom as having the capacity to think and reflect and find the 'deeper meaning of a concept'. They also alluded to the wise as people who have the ability to think for themselves, and have their 'own opinion and they try to be open-minded but at the same time they don't just go with the crowd every time'. The students associated wisdom with having knowledge about many things, which would include the knowledge of this world and the spiritual world of God. They referred to the spiritual aspect of wisdom as 'an inner truth' that comes from the individual's soul, and is connected with an understanding of God and being close to Him.

In terms of *understanding of this world*, students referred to wisdom as the application of one's knowledge to life and knowing how the world works:

*Wisdom is like evaluating something and seeing which would be the best course of action in the circumstance, or even in a conversation...*

The students described wise people as individuals who knew 'how to conduct themselves in this world' and who 'have the capacity to give advice to others on how to conduct themselves in a way that would be appropriate to the situation'. Wisdom was also conceptualised as having the ability to solve problems and *make decisions* in life based on one's knowledge and experience.

### **Participants' perception of the components of wisdom**

What follows is a synthesis of the participants' responses to the interview question, 'what are the components of wisdom?'. Similar to the previous question, the participants who were interviewed comprised of: a) the founder, the principal and the vice-principal, who are part of the leadership unit of the school and who provide the foresight and direction; b) staff who create an environment to carry out the vision of the leadership; and c) students who provide insight into the effect and influence of the vision and the created environment, and whose values, perceptions and beliefs are the product of the school.

- **Leadership group**

The founder referred to some of the components of wisdom as having 'purity of motive' and the ability to produce 'beauty in [one's] life'. He also referred to the need for a constellation of values required for wisdom. An important aspect of wisdom was alluded to as having 'absolute selflessness – to be able to look after the best interest of another person'. Alluding to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder

mentioned that in this age it was no longer enough 'to do unto others as others would do unto you', but to prefer others to yourself. The founder explained his understanding that this view has a direct impact on the quality of service one renders. The quality of service should then become one of self-sacrifice and self-effacement. Furthermore, he stated that the act of service also begins 'a dynamic of growth, starts a thirst for skill and starts joy and happiness' which benefits others. Some other necessary components of wisdom were perceived as having the ability to reflect on situations and being measured in one's approach. Using moderation and balance in thinking were suggested as significant components of wisdom. Hence, the founder's conceptions of the components of wisdom touched upon the sub-categories of *moral action*, *other focused* and *critical reflection*.

The principal and the vice-principal referred to wise action as 'obedience to the Will of God'. They proposed that wisdom is a 'spiritual entity' that one would acquire over the course of one's life, suggesting that 'becoming wise means becoming more in touch with our spiritual nature and being closer to God'. In terms of *moral action*, the vice-principal suggested wisdom as being the capacity to embrace each virtue 'beyond its traditional sense and meaning'. For example, he suggested that the meaning of trustworthiness was recognising that one has 'to apply trustworthiness to every soul and individual' one meets.

The vice-principal regarded *critical reflection* as an important aspect of wisdom. He referred to the understanding of the concept of the Oneness of Humanity 'as a Bahá'í' that 'all the people of the planet are one'. The vice-principal likened humanity to one body and stated that 'the learning of any particular part of that body,

for instance myself, as a cell in the body of mankind' would mean learning what is true of the whole of humanity.

In terms of wisdom being *other focused*, the principal and vice-principal had similar views to those of the founder. They referred to wisdom as 'something that facilitates well-being for others'. Speech also was mentioned in terms of 'application of knowledge and timing, and the ability to speak in a certain way with certain words'. The vice-principal referred to the positive influence of speech when one uses words 'as soft as milk'.

- **Staff**

The staff's conceptions of the components of wisdom included all the sub-categories of *moral action*, *other focused*, *critical reflection* and *enquiry oriented*. Some staff proposed wisdom to be 'making systematic strategic choices based on understanding'. They referred to wise people as 'soft spoken and non-confrontational'. The staff regarded the application of the *Moral Capabilities*, which underlie the philosophy of the school, as indicative of wisdom. They suggested that a wise person would also be 'compassionate', 'understanding', 'have vision', 'would be knowledgeable and trustworthy', would 'give advice' and 'would be able to apply justice and fairness'.

In terms of being *other focused*, the staff referred to a wise person as someone who will 'observe' and 'accept others'. Their conception of a wise teacher was someone who was 'patient', 'firm', gave 'reasons for the boundaries set', recognised that 'each individual is different' and would 'deal with students differently according to their capacities'. Some staff shared their understanding of the importance of 'respecting the innate nobility of all people' as a significant component of wisdom. They



referred to a wise person as one who would have ‘the ability to make choices that benefit everyone’, and be able to see ‘outside of one’s self interest’. This wise person would make ‘choices based on reflection and prayer’, and be able to remove himself/herself from the situation so that he/she is able ‘to reflect on the meaning of situations and the dynamics of things’. The staff commented that wisdom is ‘the reflection and learning from experiences and further planning’. In the words of one of the staff, ‘wisdom is what happens when we are reflecting on our actions’.

The staff suggested that a wise person would understand that ‘souls can reflect the attributes of God’. Some staff described a wise person as an individual who has ‘good countenance’, who realises that one is responsible for oneself and is able to ‘see negative events as positive opportunities for spiritual growth’.

- **Students**

Similar to staff, students’ conceptions of the components of wisdom included the four sub-categories of *moral action*, *other focused*, *critical reflection* and *enquiry oriented*. Students illustrated the components of wisdom in terms of *moral action* as someone who ‘really wants to help’ and ‘who can help’. The students referred to ‘truthfulness and tactfulness’ as virtues of a wise person equipped with the skills necessary to help. They suggested that a wise person ‘will not be talkative’, but ‘will be confident’, ‘astute’, ‘knowledgeable’, and one ‘who has life experience’, ‘good social relationships’ and is just.

In terms of being *other focused*, the students referred to a wise person who ‘will be considerate and will not impose his/her knowledge but share it’ with others. ‘A wise person will not belittle anyone’, but rather will ‘listen’ to people, will ‘consider other people’s feelings’ and try to ‘picture what other people are thinking’.

Some other qualities of a wise person, as proposed by the students, were the ‘ability to reflect on one’s actions’ (*critical reflection*) and ‘not to be rash’; have ‘logic’; speak only when ‘necessary’; have the ability to learn from one’s mistakes; have balance ‘between one’s knowledge, emotions and spirituality’, and make ‘decisions and find the deeper meaning in things’. Finally, with regard to being *enquiry oriented*, the students referred to a wise person as having ‘an open mind’, who ‘investigates’ matters, and makes ‘new discoveries’ and understandings that will equip him/her in making decisions.

### **Categories interpreted**

The next step was to interpret the data after reflection and analysis of the participants’ responses from the two main sets of categories. The ‘interpretation’ of the two main sets of categories resulted in the formulation of the ‘*wisdom process*’, which is the deduced/construed entity based on the data analysis. After further reflection and analysis of the data through interviews and observation, it became apparent that from the participants’ perspectives, wisdom is more than knowledge and experience through the application of knowledge. Wisdom involves a process that includes knowledge, reflection and action in the light of a particular framework.

In identifying and clarifying the process of wisdom from the participants’ perspectives, the following sub-categories emerged from the data analysis. The ‘*wisdom process*’ is classified as having five stages: 1) Innate capacity; 2) Stimulus and study; 3) Acquired understanding; 4) Decision-making; and 5) Reflection on experiences. It should be noted that each sub-category is part of the process.

The participants’ responses to the two research questions were then analysed according to these five steps and a summary of the five stages of the ‘*wisdom*

*process*’ was given. The ‘*wisdom process*’ was then correlated with the conceptual framework, consisting of the representative voices of Socrates for philosophy, Sternberg for psychology and *Proverbs* for Biblical studies in the light of the Baha’i framework.

### **The ‘*wisdom process*’**

#### **1. Innate capacity**

Deep within each individual there is an innate capacity for the individual to become wise. This capacity is associated with the entire human being, consisting of the body, the mind and the soul. The source of this capacity is God, who is the source of all virtues.

#### **2. Stimulus and study**

The innate capacity is awakened by education stimuli and expresses itself in thinking, investigating, studying and exploring fields of knowledge, both spiritual and material.

#### **3. Acquired understanding**

The result of this investigation of existing knowledge means that the individual acquires an understanding of the spiritual and material worlds which has the potential for good in their own lives and those of others.

#### **4. Decision-making**

The spiritual and material understanding acquired provides the basis for making informed and beneficial moral and life decisions. These decisions become an integral part of the person’s life experience.

## **5. Reflection on experience**

Reflection on the decisions made and actions taken – life experiences – enables the individual to gain a new level of understanding to plan what additional knowledge needs to be explored and how decisions can be made better.

### **The ‘*wisdom process*’ reflected in the participants’ responses**

#### **1. Innate capacity**

Many of the participants were of the view that wisdom is an innate capacity. The founder articulated this point by stating that ‘wisdom does not happen to adults at a certain age, I think wisdom begins when the child is in the womb’. He also referred to wisdom as being ‘manifested in this world’, implying that wisdom is innate in every human being. The participants’ references to the ‘potential nobility’ of human beings indicate a belief in the innate goodness and inherent potential for morally upright characteristics, of which wisdom is an important one.

Wisdom as an innate capacity was also described as ‘spiritual in nature’, referring to God as the source of wisdom. The participants emphasised the need for constant awareness of the presence of God within the individual and obedience to His laws, revealed progressively. The participants’ expression of the spiritual nature of wisdom implies that human beings are also spiritual in nature, having a physical existence in order to fulfil their God-given capacities. Hence, wisdom is an innate capacity endowed by God and needs to be nurtured during one’s physical life.

One participant touched upon the importance of always reflecting ‘the highest self’ and its association with wisdom. ‘Highest self’ denotes once again the potential for reflection of virtues that are within oneself. Also, reference to wisdom as ‘an inner truth’, stemming from the soul of the individual, is indicative of wisdom as innate capacity. The reference to wisdom as becoming more in touch with one’s spiritual

nature and becoming close to God signifies the concept of nurturing one's inner capacities given by God.

## **2. Stimulus and study**

The founder expressed succinctly the need for the stimulus and study of wisdom:

*... wisdom has to do with becoming as knowledgeable as you can be about virtues, qualities and capabilities as well as arts and sciences, and apply it and make it manifest in this world.*

The participants perceived the school played a major role in awakening the inner capacity through education stimuli. They believed that an education that will awaken the inner capacity does not only offer academic courses but also provides a fertile ground for developing capabilities and a thirst to study wisdom. When the students learn about virtues, their spiritual senses are stimulated to study and practice wisdom. Some staff held that wisdom 'is the acquisition of knowledge [and] spiritual truths, and applying it to one's life so that it will profit both oneself and others.'

Once the innate capacity is awakened, the student will seek to study wisdom through thinking, investigating, studying and exploring fields of knowledge, both spiritual and material. Some participants saw the study of the sacred scriptures as a motivating force to study and explore both spiritual and material knowledge.

When the innate capacity is awakened, as one of the students stated, wisdom becomes 'about learning and sharing and feeling'. Some students expressed that wisdom is the acquisition of knowledge and also the 'ability to think for oneself', which implies the ability to search and to investigate the truth independently. The expression 'to investigate the truth independently' refers to the concept of searching for the truth for oneself and not following or blindly believing what the forefathers

have believed. In this way, the student expresses his/her awakened sense of innate capacity in seeking to investigate and explore fields of knowledge.

Almost all the participants spoke about wisdom and knowledge. A student in a school environment that is conducive to the awakening of the innate capacity would consider a wise person to have a ‘thirst for knowledge’, acquire as much knowledge as possible and be open to knowledge. Some staff talked directly about wisdom as the impulse to acquire both religious and scientific concepts and ideas. Some participants talked about a wise person as someone who has an open mind, investigates and makes new discoveries. In all of the above, the role of the school in providing a comprehensive education in order to stimulate the potential within each student was expressed to be of the utmost importance.

### **3. Acquired understanding**

The expression that wisdom is the need ‘to know about my potential nobility’ articulates an acquired understanding of the potential to be good and to do good. One becomes aware of this through education.

Wisdom has been expressed as an understanding of how to respond to situations where one can bring ‘harmony to all’. Spiritually, it has been expressed as ‘the understanding of God, to be close to Him’. This explanation of wisdom implies that in order for one to have an understanding of God, one would have to acquire both spiritual and material knowledge. Spiritual knowledge from the sacred scriptures of all religions of the world and material knowledge from all the sciences and arts, which stem from the knowledge of God, are both essential to provide a basis for making informed and beneficial moral decisions.

Reference to wisdom as ‘the deeper meaning of a concept’ signifies that wisdom manifests itself when one gains a deeper understanding of a particular concept, whether spiritual or material. This deeper understanding can no longer be labelled as mere knowledge about a particular thing; rather it is reflective of the potential of that knowledge and how it can be applied for good in one’s own life and in the life of others. Many participants stated that knowledge is what one knows; wisdom is the acquired capacity to apply that knowledge to life. The application of knowledge to life implies a process of understanding on behalf of the individual as to how one would use that knowledge to further one’s own interest whilst being acutely aware of being part of a larger entity – that of society.

One participant mentioned that ‘wisdom is being able to recognise wholeness’. One needs to understand the connectivity of the entities of life to be able to recognise wholeness. The interconnectedness of human beings with each other and with nature is indispensable to recognising wholeness. The ‘ability to reflect on situations’ brings about a deeper understanding of the connectedness of the material and the spiritual worlds.

The statement that wisdom is about ‘recognition ... that all people of the planet are one...’ is another example of acquired understanding. This understanding was explained further as likening the body of mankind to the body of a person, where all the members and limbs are interconnected and the condition of one limb can influence the whole of the body. Similarly, a wise person would ‘make choices that would affect in a positive way the whole body of mankind...’. Another example of an acquired understanding is ‘understanding that souls can reflect the attributes of God’. The concept of all human beings having the capacity to reflect the attributes of

God is a result of investigation of both material and spiritual knowledge. The spiritual knowledge comes from all the sacred scriptures, which have similar underlying universal principles such as love, compassion, truthfulness, courage, trust and kindness. The material knowledge comes from the practice of these virtues and the experience of true joy within the individual for having been loving, compassionate, truthful, courageous, trustworthy and kind.

Many references were made to wisdom as not just knowledge but understanding that ‘wisdom is not only knowing but understanding the background of situations and circumstances independently’. When one is aware of the other party’s perspectives and various backgrounds, one will become ‘a wise person’ who is astute and ‘who has life experience, knowledge, justice and good social relationships’:

*Ultimately I think wisdom comes back to the source. And it is ultimately about knowing who we are...and what we are here to do and accomplish with our lives.*

#### **4. Decision-making**

Acquired understanding provides the basis for making informed and beneficial moral decisions in one’s life. One of the participants defined wisdom as the need ‘to know that the purpose in my life is to serve the body of mankind’. Arriving at the above conclusion about what is essential to be wise indicates a process of growth in one’s thinking. The individual is deciding to serve the body of humanity in practising wisdom.

Another participant stated that ‘wisdom is the ability to know when to do what’. Wisdom is not only knowing what to do. The timing becomes important, as one would want to make decisions that would benefit all. The reference to wisdom’s definition, which consists of ‘three parts: base knowledge; justice; and the ability to



make decisions’, is a meaningful statement denoting the need for knowledge but more importantly the ability to make decisions that are based on justice, have taken into consideration the needs of all involved and can serve the best interests of all.

A wise person is described as having ‘an understanding of the way the world works’. Wise people ‘would be able to conduct themselves and would be able to advise others on how to conduct themselves in a way that would be appropriate to a situation’. Therefore, ‘wisdom is like evaluating something and seeing which would be the best course of action in the circumstance’. Having an understanding of the way the world works and having the ability to select the best course of action becomes an integral part of the person’s life experience. One of the participants alluded to wisdom as:

*... a mix of your experiences and your knowledge that you have to make decisions about things that happen in life.*

## **5. Reflection on experience**

The comment of one of the participants about wisdom being ‘the intuitive ability to make decisions from experiences’ also describes the process of reflection on an individual’s life experiences and the exploration of how decisions can be made better. Wisdom was considered ‘logic’ and ‘the ability to solve problems’, thus enabling the individual to gain a new level of understanding.

Participants described the process of reflection on experience in various ways, yet all referred to the necessity and importance of reflection on actions taken for further planning. One participant explained the process of wisdom as follows:

*I think an important component is detachment, being able to remove yourself from a given situation enough to look at and really reflect on the*

*meaning of the situation and the dynamics of things, the meaning of what you are doing, of what is going on around you.*

Another stated that ‘wisdom is making choices based on reflection and prayer’.

Others were of the opinion also that wisdom has to do with ‘being able to see things in the long term, being able to see an event from other people’s perspectives, how they would interpret it’, signifying the need for evaluation and reflection.

Reflection on one’s decisions that have been taken in one’s life enables the individual to gain a new level of understanding. This enhanced understanding, along with the individual’s experience, prepares the individual to plan what other knowledge or experiences are required to be investigated so that future decisions can be improved upon and surpass the previous ones. As one of the participants described:

*... part of it has been for me learning from my own mistakes and really reflecting on those mistakes and deciding how I am going ... to change or how I am going to approach the situation differently the next time.*

One participant described the process of wisdom as ‘reflection, learning from experience and planning’. Another participant explained that wisdom comes ‘through experience ... through the conscious application of lessons learnt’. Therefore, as another participant stated, wisdom becomes ‘learning from your mistakes’.

It is interesting to note that wisdom was defined as ‘balance between one’s knowledge, emotions and spirituality’. The three constituents of knowledge, emotions and spirituality are much needed in reflection on experience. Moreover, a sense of balance between the three allows the individual to gain a new level of

understanding in preparation for future wise decisions. As one participant stated:

*... a wise person reflects on concepts ... has the ability to make decisions  
and find the deeper meaning in things.*

### **Summary of the ‘*wisdom process*’**

The first step in the ‘*wisdom process*’ is the recognition of the existence of an innate capacity within each human being to become wise, acknowledging that wisdom comes from God. The construct of a human being does not consist merely of the physical body; rather the physical body is one element that needs to be accompanied by the mind and the soul. The recognition of the innate capacity to be wise gives a new perspective and purpose to an individual’s life. The recognition of the innate wisdom capacity engenders a motivating force to awaken and utilise the innate capacity for wisdom. Education is then seen as a vehicle to awaken and mobilise this innate capacity through thinking, investigating, studying and exploring both fields of material and spiritual knowledge.

The result of the application of education stimuli to awaken and utilise the innate capacity is an enhanced understanding, informed by spiritual and material knowledge about the spiritual and material worlds and their interconnectedness. Moreover, the acquired understanding, based on spiritual and material knowledge, has the potential to do good for the individual and for society. Then, based on such acquired understanding, the individual is able to make informed and effective moral and life decisions that coalesce to form the life experience of an individual. Reflection on the informed moral decisions taken by individuals in turn contributes to new levels of understanding that can be used to plan the next cycle of the study and investigation of additional knowledge to generate future decisions.

## **Correlation of the ‘*wisdom process*’ with the conceptual framework**

### **The philosophical perspective**

The conceptual framework for this thesis considered the three perspectives of philosophy, psychology and religion through a representative figure from each discipline in connection with wisdom. As discussed in Chapter Five, Socrates is the representative figure for the philosophical perspective.

There are several points of similarity between the essential characteristics of wisdom in Socrates and the ‘*wisdom process*’. The ‘*wisdom process*’ states that wisdom is an innate capacity which needs to be nurtured. Socrates does not talk directly about wisdom as an innate capacity, yet he believes that wisdom is developing the capacity to understand that the essence of divine wisdom is ultimately beyond human comprehension. Socrates also maintains that the source of wisdom is God, whose wisdom exceeds all others. Similarly, the ‘*wisdom process*’ associates the innate capacity for wisdom with the entire human being who is created by God, acknowledging that the ultimate source of wisdom is God.

Both Socrates and the ‘*wisdom process*’ assume that wisdom can be developed. Socrates maintains that human beings, through their intellect, can investigate the truth and enhance their understandings of the inner realities of created things. The ‘*wisdom process*’ also maintains that the innate capacity awakened by education stimulates itself in thinking, investigating, studying and exploring the fields of both spiritual and material knowledge.

Also, both Socrates and the ‘*wisdom process*’ maintain that those who possess wisdom have the capacity to make moral decisions based on their investigation of truth, and to form an individual’s life experience. Reflection also becomes an

important aspect of wisdom. Socrates refers to reflection as the daily reckoning of one's deeds against a divine standard. The '*wisdom process*' includes reflection on the decisions made and actions taken. This reflection enables one to gain a new level of understanding to plan further knowledge gain and exploration of how decisions can be made better.

Socrates believed in awareness of human ignorance as a valued prerequisite in seeking wisdom. This awareness involved an attitude of humility applicable to the acquisition of any form of knowledge. Socrates' strong belief in the importance of one's awareness of one's ignorance is his key contribution to the projection of wisdom as against the '*wisdom process*'. He believed in a humility that reminded one that one needs to be aware that one does not know everything, particularly in relation to understanding the essence of God and in comparison to divine knowledge. Therefore, an increasing awareness of human ignorance becomes a valued prerequisite in seeking wisdom.

The '*wisdom process*' explains wisdom as an innate capacity in each individual. This concept assumes that human beings are all basically good. All human beings have the capacity to manifest the attributes of God, which are essentially good. The '*wisdom process*' assumes that deep within each individual there are innate good qualities that need to be nurtured. Such an understanding has the danger of leading one to arrogance. The belief that 'I am essentially a good individual' may lead to self-centredness and embellishment of the self. What Socrates' warns about is that knowing our true self should lead to humility before God and His creation. An integrated view of Socrates and the '*wisdom process*' entails that through the daily

accounting of one's deeds and the knowledge of the nobility of one's being, one is assisted to struggle against ego and selfish human passions.

### **The psychological perspective**

Sternberg is the representative of the psychological perspective (see Chapter Five). He considers an appreciation of human values and the desire to work for the common good as essential, prior dispositions to seeking wisdom. He does not specifically refer to wisdom as an innate capacity in all individuals, however, he does not confine its acquisition to a certain group of people. Sternberg's notion of human values as an essential step to seeking wisdom denotes that each individual is capable of seeking and nurturing wisdom if he/she understands and has universal values. In this light, Sternberg's view correlates with the '*wisdom process*', which states that deep within each individual there is an innate capacity for the individual to become wise. In the same way that the '*wisdom process*' considers human beings as essentially noble or good, Sternberg centres the seeking of wisdom on the individual's goodness.

Sternberg identifies three ways of acquiring wisdom. The first is through the proper application of knowledge for the benefit of the common good; the second is through the explicit teaching of wisdom skills in schools; and the third is through observance of wise adults as role models. The first point, the acquisition of wisdom through the proper application of knowledge for the benefit of the common good, is based on the similar principle of an understanding of the spiritual and material worlds as featured in the '*wisdom process*'. The '*wisdom process*' explains that once the individual investigates the truth through thinking, studying and exploring both spiritual and material fields of knowledge, the result will be an enhanced understanding of both the spiritual and material worlds. More importantly, this enhanced, balanced

understanding has the potential for good in one's own life and the life of others.

Where Sternberg raises the importance of the proper application of knowledge for the benefit of others, the '*wisdom process*', considering the same principle, points to the 'how' of the acquisition of knowledge where it can lead to the benefit of oneself and others.

While Sternberg identifies the explicit teaching of wisdom skills in schools and the observance of wise adults as role models as requisites for acquiring wisdom, the '*wisdom process*' does not talk about these. However, it indicates a focus on the dire need to teach wisdom at schools and the example of one Bahá'í-inspired school where role modelling and mentorship of teachers are of utmost importance.

Sternberg categorically states that intelligence on its own is the cause of four fallacies: egocentrism; omniscience; omnipotence; and invulnerability. Therefore, he defines wisdom not as a quantitative trait but rather as a capacity to apply a balance of successful intelligence and a concern for values in the attainment of common good. This concept is similar to the principles of the '*wisdom process*', which firstly considers the human being as both spiritual and material; secondly highlights the need for the awakening of the innate capacity through education stimuli that explore both the spiritual and material fields of knowledge; and thirdly emphasises the acquisition of both spiritual and material understanding, which provides the basis for making informed and beneficial moral and life decisions.

Sternberg states that the moral dimension of wisdom is to understand that universal values common to all religions are an integral part of wise thinking. Similarly, the '*wisdom process*' states that moral life decisions are made on the basis of the understanding acquired through both spiritual and material fields of knowledge.

These decisions become an integral part of the person's life experience, which need reflection in order for the individual to gain a new level of understanding to plan the exploration of future knowledge and how decisions can be made better.

### **The religious perspective**

The *Book of Proverbs* refers to the essential characteristics of wisdom, stating that the ultimate source of wisdom is God (YHWH), who employed wisdom in the construction of the universe, designing each component in its own 'way'. The 'way' is the inner code that governs a human being's essential character. Similarly, the '*wisdom process*' refers to the source of wisdom as God, acknowledging that deep within each individual there is an innate wisdom capacity for that individual to become wise. As this innate capacity is associated with a human being who has been created by God, one could infer that the source of wisdom, according to the '*wisdom process*', is also God.

According to the *Book of Proverbs*, the acquisition of wisdom occurs both by learning the truths of reality handed down by the wisdom tradition and exploring afresh the inner reality of things in the natural world. The *Book of Proverbs*' understanding of the acquisition of wisdom corresponds broadly with the '*wisdom process*' and its focus on understanding about the need for study and investigation. The '*wisdom process*' asserts that wisdom is acquired initially through the awakening of the innate capacity so that both fields of spiritual and material knowledge can be investigated. The learning of spiritual knowledge may be likened in part to the wisdom tradition that is handed down by each generation according to the *Book of Proverbs*. The investigation of material knowledge can be likened to the exploration of the inner reality of things in the natural world.



The *Book of Proverbs* does not talk about wisdom as an innate capacity within each individual. However, it states that an attitude of awe before God is a valued prerequisite in seeking wisdom. The attitude of awe before God serves as a warning that the knowledge of an innate wisdom capacity within each individual should not lead to arrogance and pride. in particular before God.

According to the *Book of Proverbs*, wisdom is more than the knowledge about things. It involves developing the capacity to distinguish between what effects good or positive outcomes in life and what works for evil. This concept corresponds with the '*wisdom process*', which maintains that once an individual has acquired both spiritual and material understanding based on the investigation of both fields of knowledge, the acquired understanding has the potential for good in the individual's own life and in the life of others.

In the context of decision-making, once again both the *Book of Proverbs* and the '*wisdom process*' assert that acquired spiritual and material understanding enables one to make moral decisions that are beneficial not only for one's own interests but for the interests of all concerned. According to the *Book of Proverbs*, the person who possesses wisdom has the capacity to make moral decisions that go beyond the rigid following of traditional religious laws or social mores.

The '*wisdom process*' follows decision-making with reflection on experience. This enables the individual to gain a new level of understanding, and to plan what additional knowledge needs to be explored and how decisions can be made better.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the participants' perceptions of the concepts of wisdom – what it is and what its components are – and has used these to create the '*wisdom process*'. It can be seen by comparing the findings in this chapter with the background information presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six, that the participants' perspectives on the concepts of wisdom in a Bahá'í-inspired school correlate closely with the concepts of wisdom in the Bahá'í Faith in general.

Thus, the key development to emerge from the data discussed in this chapter has been the formulation of the '*wisdom process*', resulting from the interpretation of the data based on the two research questions, 'what is wisdom?' and 'what are its components?'. The five stages of the '*wisdom process*' include: i) innate capacity – which acknowledges the individual's innate capacity for wisdom; ii) stimulus and study – which acknowledges the need to awaken the innate capacity through education stimuli; iii) acquired understanding – the understanding which is gained as a result of the education stimuli and the quest for understanding the deeper meanings of the concepts; iv) decision-making – based on the acquired understanding the individual is then able to make beneficial moral choices; and v) reflections on experiences – signifying the importance of reflection on actions taken for seeking additional knowledge and making better future plans.

This chapter, which has focused on the theory of wisdom education, has reflected the participants' responses to the two research questions, which were analysed according to the five stages of the '*wisdom process*'. It has also provided a summary of the five stages of this '*wisdom process*' and concluded with the correlation of the '*wisdom process*' with the conceptual framework.

Chapter Eight continues the exploration of the perceptions of NCCI staff and students about the acquisition of wisdom in both theory and practice.

## **Chapter Eight: The Acquisition of Wisdom in ‘Theory’ and in ‘Practice’ at a Bahá’í-inspired School**

### **Introduction**

The focus of Chapter Eight is to analyse and classify how wisdom is acquired in theory and how a Bahá’í-inspired school addresses this issue in practical terms, according to the participants. Similar to the previous chapter, it focuses on reporting, analysis and interpretation of the findings from the data gleaned from participant observation, interviews and document/curriculum analysis at a Bahá’í-inspired school.

In this chapter, (i) the data is gleaned from the interview transcripts and a sample of quotations is shared in Appendix Three; and (ii) the findings are then interpreted and synthesised into sub-categories derived from the data.

Similar to the previous chapter, the collected data were perused repeatedly to formulate emerging concepts, which arose in response to the interview questions:

- 1) Can children/youth acquire wisdom?
- 2) What role do schools have in creating an environment where wisdom can be developed/acquired?
- 3) How does NCCI in particular facilitate the acquisition of wisdom?

The formulation of the concepts was an evolving process that required the perusal of the data several times in order to capture not only the qualitative essence of the ideas expressed but also to cover all the ideas articulated.

As a result of this formulation of the concepts, two sets of sub-categories emerged that corresponded to the three interview questions noted above. Although the objective was to capture the responses to the three different research questions, it

should be noted that the answers to the three overlap. It happens often that the participant's response is not focused on the particular question asked. However, the questions have been treated separately as much as possible, and two distinct categories have been developed relating to the acquisition of wisdom in *theory* and the acquisition of wisdom in *practice*.

Furthermore, the sub-categories under each title of theory and practice also overlap. These sub-categories are designed to clarify, in broad terms, the diverse ways of acquiring wisdom from the participants' perspectives. Participants did not confine the acquisition of wisdom to just one of these sub-categories; most referred to more than one way of acquiring wisdom. Hence, people's perception of the acquisition of wisdom may cover more than one sub-category. The acquisition of wisdom is not understood as a one-step task but as a series of steps designed to stimulate and develop the innate wisdom in individuals. In this way, this chapter is consistent with the '*wisdom process*' and provides a practical dimension of the acquisition of wisdom.

The first set of sub-categories denotes the acquisition of wisdom in *theory* (Appendix Two, Table 1). These sub-categories, which emerged in response to the two research questions, 'Can children/youth acquire wisdom?' and 'What role do schools have in creating an environment where wisdom can be developed/acquired?', are as follows:

- 1a) stimulus of innate wisdom*
- 1b) learning through exploration*
- 1c) reflection on experience*
- 1d) spiritual impulse*

Sub-category 1a), *stimulus of innate wisdom*, is about the belief that children have an innate capacity for wisdom which needs to be stimulated.

Sub-category 1b), *learning through exploration*, is about learning through investigation of both material and spiritual knowledge, as a means to stimulate acquired wisdom.

Sub-category 1c), *reflection on experience*, is about the acquisition of wisdom through conscious reflection on decision-making and application of lessons learnt.

Sub-category 1d), *spiritual impulse*, is about recognising God as the greatest source of wisdom and the impetus to pursue one's purpose in this life.

The second set of sub-categories denotes the acquisition of wisdom in *practice* (Appendix Two, Table 2), which emerged in response to the research question, 'How does NCCI in particular facilitate the acquisition of wisdom?'. These sub-categories, which were discerned after analysis of the data, are listed below:

*2a) promoting spiritual awareness in the school environment*

*2b) implementation of the 19 Moral Capabilities*

*2c) employment of the technique of consultation*

*2d) implementation of the concept of mentorship*

*2e) upholding the principle of Unity in Diversity*

*2f) the use of arts through dance and theatre workshops to enhance social, moral and spiritual understandings*

*2g) structure and participation in morning assemblies*

### **The acquisition of wisdom in 'theory' as reflected in the data**

The present chapter reflects the interviews with the founder, principal, vice-principal, the staff and students of the school. Two tables (Appendix Two, Tables 1 & 2) have been formulated on the acquisition of wisdom in *theory* and in *practice*. It should be noted that the quotations in the displayed tables are representative participant statements, used to illustrate their understanding of the acquisition of wisdom.

The first table has several sub-categories based on the participants' responses to the questions. These sub-categories for the acquisition of wisdom in theory – *1a) stimulus of innate wisdom, 1b) learning through exploration, 1c) reflection on experience* and *1d) spiritual impulse* – are referred to in italics for easy reference in the following report of the findings.

### **Acquisition of wisdom in 'theory'**

- **Leadership group**

In terms of the *acquisition of wisdom*, the founder maintained that 'wisdom does not happen to adults at a certain age', rather 'wisdom begins when the child is in the womb'. This notion expresses the belief that *wisdom is innate* and needs to be nurtured. The founder claimed that it is vitally critical that 'virtues and qualities be taught' to the child from the very beginning so that this innate wisdom is *stimulated*. Moreover, he highlighted that these virtues and qualities 'must be rooted to their divine source'.

The founder also maintained that *wisdom can be learnt* by employing guided reflection, philosophy for children, world dilemma discussions and giving people the role of service for the betterment of the world. He was of the opinion that service allows the realisation of values and beliefs in action 'that confirms one's commitment' and encourages one 'to value what one believes'. His view of wisdom was also one which considered wisdom to be a *spiritual impulse* that is given by God. He stated that 'the first and the most important relationship to make us genuine is the relationship of the Creator', stressing that 'if we understand that the spiritual principle is the greatest source of wisdom', then individuals would study the sacred writings revealed by the Prophets of God, which in turn would increase their thirst

for spirituality and ‘help [them] deepen [their] understanding of the physical and intellectual and psychological world with the spiritual principles that guide them’.

The principal was of the view that *wisdom can be learnt* through observation, obedience and a general understanding of God. Sharing her own experience of the acquisition of wisdom, she stated how:

*... as a child wisdom was acquired from watching [her] parents and listening to [her] parents ... it was always understood in the family that God was everywhere and existed in all things, and that we are responsible to behave in a way that God would expect us to be.*

- **Staff**

The staff in general viewed children as having *innate wisdom* and saw it as the role of teachers *to stimulate this wisdom* and help develop it:

*Most children already have a great deal of wisdom and as adults we just need to take the time to see it and to listen...*

They maintained that the children’s naivety was not the reason for their lack of intelligence or lack of wisdom, rather ‘many times they are closer to the truth’. The example of the growth of a seed was shared by one of the teachers, and the time and attention that it requires for its development was considered. The seed needs ‘soil, warmth and sunshine to be able to grow’. Similarly, children need to be ‘nurtured in a loving and safe environment’ in order for them to manifest their wisdom from within.

The staff also maintained that *wisdom can be learnt* through ‘asking questions of ourselves, of our peers and also of our mentors’. Some also stated that wisdom can



be acquired from the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, in which, in their own words:

*Wisdom is acquired through meditation, through prayer, through regular readings of the Holy Scriptures, through applying the teachings in your life, by making those choices that we make every day.*

The staff also referred to the important role of parents in facilitating wisdom. An interesting aspect which was discussed by staff was that 'wisdom has to come from knowledge and the knowledge has to come from the educator, from learning'.

Referring to the day-to-day life of the student, the staff maintained that wisdom is acquired also through 'the company they keep, their upbringing and environment'.

However, teachers can set 'very clear parameters' with students and give them the power to make structured choices from a very early age in a safe environment.

The staff perceived wisdom as a *spiritual impulse*. They maintained that wisdom could be acquired not only through trial and error, observation and speech, but also through the use of 'spiritual senses and then putting all this together and understanding how to make choices'. The staff proposed that wisdom, as a spiritual impulse, is connected with its ultimate source – God:

*Ultimately I think wisdom comes back to the Source. And it is ultimately about knowing who we are ... and what we are here to do and accomplish with our lives.*

The staff maintained that acquisition of wisdom is also connected with '*having experiences*' and 'the conscious application of lessons learnt'. It is in this connection that teachers felt the students should be allowed the opportunity 'to be wrong in a safe environment'. The teachers stated that they 'can only provide this nest for them, this nurturing environment that will allow them to feel safe enough to make this discovery for themselves'.

- **Students**

The students conveyed their understanding of the acquisition of wisdom in a variety of ways. In terms of *wisdom being innate*, one of the students remarked that ‘I think everyone is wise, you just have to learn how to release it’. Other remarks regarding the acquisition of wisdom were, ‘children acquire wisdom right from the start, when they are born’ and ‘lots of youth are endowed with wisdom’. The students articulated *the need for nurturing the innate* by stating:

*I think that my wisdom was acquired through my parents, but it is embedded in you from a young age.*

They talked about acquiring wisdom through:

*... learning and sharing and feeling...through actions ... reflecting on what you do in the day, what you could do to improve or change it by reading, researching.*

The connection of wisdom with spirituality was apparent through remarks such as:

*Wisdom is having knowledge and like having a conscience more...wisdom of the native elders have been brought to them by the Creator...one of the main components, I think would be help from the spiritual realm, help from God.*

Acquisition of wisdom was seen also as ‘reflection on the sacred writings’ and trying to incorporate them into everyday life.

The students shared their understanding about wisdom as something that one acquires through ‘experience rather than learning it out of a book’. *Time and reflection on experience* were referred to as crucial factors for acquiring wisdom:

*...part of it has been from me learning from my own mistakes and really reflecting on those mistake and deciding how I was going...to change or how I am going to approach the situation differently the next time.*

Reflection on experience was considered by students as an important factor:

*Just by doing, by trial and error, I don't think you can figure out the mathematics of it. It is just something you get by trying things.*

Students also referred to acquiring wisdom from people who are wise themselves, 'live native elders'.

### **Acquisition of wisdom in 'practice' by the Bahá'í -inspired school of Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute**

After reflection on, and analysis of the data through interviews, and the analysis of curricula and observation, it became apparent from the staff perspective, supported by the students, that the acquisition of wisdom is more than seeking knowledge from the elders, God and the environment around us. There needs to be a mechanism in place in order to stimulate the innate wisdom. The school's role, therefore, becomes extremely important as it devises educational methods in order to stimulate the wisdom within.

An explanation of the moral framework of NCCI, based on the *19 Moral Capabilities*, is provided by the founder of the School. This explanation was requested from the founder during a separate interview and is presented in the Excursus (Appendix Three).

After analysis of the data, which included the six-week observation at the school, and from the school philosophy and its adopted framework of *Moral Capabilities*, a second set of sub-categories denoting the acquisition of wisdom in *practice* (Appendix Two, Table 2) emerged in response to the research question 'How does NCCI in particular facilitate the acquisition of wisdom?'. These derived sub-categories involve: 2a) *promoting spiritual awareness*; 2b) *implementing the 19*

*Moral Capabilities; 2c) employing the technique and structure of consultation; 2d) implementing the concept of mentorship; 2e) upholding the principle of Unity in Diversity; 2f) use of arts through dance and theatre workshops to enhance social and moral understandings; and 2g) the structure of morning assemblies.* It should be noted that each sub-category is part of the whole process.

## **1. The promotion of spiritual awareness in the school environment**

- **Leadership group**

The founder claimed that what is interesting about ‘spirituality and wisdom’ is that:

*... [as] we become the community who is prepared to see ourselves as learners we are continually evolved by what can be created by the human spirit and by the divine forces assistance and it will never be possible to predict the heights that it will grow.*

He communicated the need ‘to pay attention to creating environments that create learning and allow the creative spirit of people to emerge’. To emphasise his point, the founder quoted from the words of Bahá’u’lláh, stating:

*Regard man rich in gems of inestimable value, education alone can cause it to reveal its treasures and benefit mankind therefrom.*

The founder maintained that his understanding of this quotation is that we have the responsibility to ‘create the environment in which gems can grow’. He liked the remark of one of the dance teachers after one of the school performances, who said: ‘This place is a green house for talent’. He thought this was the right definition of what a school can be to create the conditions for growth and wisdom for all involved.

Professional development workshops for the staff take place three times a year: once at the beginning of the year; again at the beginning of semester two; and a third time at the end of the year. These are occasions for learning and reviewing the concepts of

moral leadership as a *spiritual factor* in the school. A similarity was drawn between the example of teachers who can get over-involved with the task of just delivering the curriculum and the mornings when one wakes up and is late to work, and forgets to say one's prayers. Forgetting one's prayers in the mornings makes one feel uncomfortable for the rest of the day and it is the same with not striving to implement a clear moral framework.

The development and concept of moral leadership have been of great interest to the administrative staff of NCCI. The principal shared that moral leadership 'is not just for administrators'; it is important to realise 'that each of us is a leader in some way' and this sense of moral leadership has to be nurtured in the students. The principal remarked that making students '*aware of spiritual principles*' is the best way to serve the students. It was stated that:

*Students want to know what kindness is, how do we show it, how do we put it in place, what is trustworthiness and the whole concept of truthfulness as being the foundation of all the other virtues.*

One does not have to bring religion into it. During the course of the principal's career as a teacher in the public school system, students talked about God and the Creator without her ever having to step over the line of bringing religion into the class. She claimed that wisdom is related to God's knowledge and within the school it is promoted through the writings of all the manifestations of God:

*We use Hindu writings, we use Buddhist writings, we use Bahá'í, Christian writings ... it is all the same source ... if you look outside the faith group they can be applied to the conscious knowledge of the Oneness of God.*

The principal indicated that as an educator we are a learner, and as a learner one can recognise the need of other learners such as students. Everyone is a learner and part

of the process is ‘to encourage building autonomous learners’. In order for an educator to facilitate autonomous learners, the educator should be conscious that students have a soul, and ‘the design of the soul is to know and to worship the creator, according to the Bahá’í writings’. It should be recognised that the soul’s design is the need ‘to know’. Then, the care-givers can appreciate that ‘the desire of the soul to want to learn’ needs to be developed.

- **Staff**

The twin pillars of academic excellence and a clear moral framework form the foundation of the school environment in which *spiritual awareness* becomes of the utmost importance. The moral framework is based on *the 19 Moral Capabilities*, which the students and staff of the school endeavour to put into practice on a daily basis. As one of the staff indicated, ‘schools need both academic as well as moral teachings for a true education and at NCCI these are the twin pillars’. The staff also make it clear that based on the Bahá’í writings, it is more important for an individual to be a morally upright person than an academic elite. Hence, morality has precedence over academic achievement. When these concepts are presented to the parents, it has been noticed that they ‘innately realise and appreciate the moral teachings’.

In the words of one of the staff, NCCI facilitates wisdom:

*... in a way that allows the youth to be themselves and gives them the opportunity to explore ... they’re given the tools, the teachers here, and staff they give guidance and support to all the students and by doing so it allows them to think for themselves ... NCCI is a very good environment for creating wisdom. People obtain wisdom, they are given every opportunity to expand, to go further, not just to accept that this is what it is and that is all there is.*

Staff claimed that a high level of discipline is not punishing students in a strict environment, but setting high standards where students feel supported. The students should be made aware that if someone breaks the rules there are consequences which will be implemented.

The dorm parents encourage the spiritual component by introducing the idea of having prayers on a daily basis. They arrange talks and discussion evenings in the residential area for youth to talk about issues that are important for their spiritual development at a given time. They try to get to know each student, ‘what is important to each one of them’, so the dorm parents can be of assistance to them.

- **Students**

The students were aware of the moral framework promoted by the school and the importance of *spiritual awareness*. One of the students remarked that:

*NCCI isn't just an ordinary school. I think there are plenty of opportunities for different things. There is also spiritual devotion and learning more about other religions.*

The students felt that their individual needs to express their spirituality to their younger or older students was understood and respected by the school regardless of their religious backgrounds.

The students also expressed their appreciation of the small class sizes, as these allowed them to work on ‘what they have learned ... more deeply and find other means for discovering solutions to problems, not just in school work but in social life’. The students recognised the need for reflection and finding the deeper meanings in life in order to acquire wisdom.

The students remarked that NCCI facilitates wisdom ‘through the basis of the foundations of the school which is moral, the principles of the Bahá’í Faith ... So I think the principles of the Bahá’í Faith help hold the body of the school.’ One student stated that God intends all to acquire wisdom and this is achieved through devotions, reading the sacred writings, learning, applying what one has learned and learning from one’s experience.

The students commented on the election process of the student council and how this is based on spiritual principles of not campaigning for elections, but ‘by secret ballot’. This different system of voting allows one to focus on the spiritual qualities of the students demonstrated in action rather than in empty promises.

One of the students remarked about the twin pillars of NCCI:

*I know that our curriculum is based on a high academic excellence and a moral framework and having those two together form quite a strong framework for raising wise people.*

Some students felt that when one does not engage in demoralising activities, one is able to be more spiritually focused. They were of the opinion that the structure of the school prevents students from engaging in harmful behaviour or activities, and that in itself is one way of facilitating wisdom. The example of the need to wear a uniform was used to illustrate the organised structure of the school. It was explained that the necessity to wear a uniform prevented students from being critical of one another due to their clothes. The students perceived the need to wear a uniform at the school as a measure towards being focused on positive matters.

Another school structure, the responsibility management committee, based on the spiritual principles, was referred to by students as facilitating wisdom. The students



expressed their understanding and experience of this committee, which is not one of punishment but rather, as the name indicates, one of assisting the students to manage their affairs responsibly. One student maintained that if he had any problems he ‘would feel comfortable going up to them and talking to them’. The committee does not only exist to help students rectify their bad behaviour and attitudes, but also to help them with their moral and spiritual challenges. The students remarked that the responsibility management committee has helped students ‘in one year, [to] stop drugs, stop swearing, stop everything’.

## **2. Implementation of the understanding of the *19 Moral Capabilities* in each class and by all staff**

- **Leadership group**

The founder claimed that the *Moral Capabilities* represent a real shift in the individual’s mental framework. He was keen to emphasise that these *Moral Capabilities* are based on a model of service rather than a model of power. Four major elements make up the *Moral Capabilities*: the concept; attitude; virtues; and skills. During *Moral Capabilities* workshops, the students go through a series of sessions in order to enhance their understanding about the *Moral Capabilities* concepts, as well as the attitude, virtues and skills needed to implement them.

The founder commented that it is important not to be too direct about the *Moral Capabilities*, as the students might have an aversion to them. Rather, the idea is to assist students to carry out activities through which they gain knowledge and experience. The staff member is then in a position to label the student’s action and make them aware of their capabilities and strengths. The founder referred to the effectiveness of personal transformational courses, developed for the world citizenship classes to help students develop the *Moral Capabilities*. Transactional

analysis and cognitive therapy are other methods of helping students develop the *Moral Capabilities*.

The principal expressed her joy in coming to know about *Moral Capabilities* when she started teaching at NCCI, and gave a historical background as to how she tried to incorporate them into every English, history and world citizenship class she put together and taught. She claimed that teachers at NCCI are encouraged to put the *Moral Capabilities* into practice at staff meetings and recognised that this takes time. Each year during staff development programmes teachers are challenged more and more to come up with strategies to incorporate the *Moral Capabilities* into the curriculum. She gave the example of when the staff were encouraged to work on the question of, ‘What does it look like when you put *Moral Capabilities* in a calculus class?’ Another example was a physics teacher who challenged his class to prove the existence or non-existence of God through physics, which caused the students to examine everything from an ethical and moral perspective.

The principal indicated that *Moral Capabilities* relate subjects to concepts and allow one to be able to see the big picture. Moreover, they allow students to see that all things are interconnected. Thus, the application of wisdom becomes important in every subject and consideration of ethical issues whilst teaching science becomes important. Other examples were given of combining certain chemicals in order to be able to genetically alter human beings. In this case, the important questions raised were: ‘Can one be a lone ranger and go and do whatever one wants?’ and ‘How will what is being developed affect poverty?’. Thus, according to the principal, ‘*Moral Capabilities* teach students about relationships and decision-making’.

The vice-principal maintained that the application of wisdom is one of the elements

of being a world citizen. The clear moral framework allows the staff to facilitate the application of the capabilities necessary to develop the staff and the students as world citizens, whom the educator would see as learners who are ‘noble beings’ and who are ‘developing their capacity to serve the common good’. The educator would perceive the students as all working towards the vision that the students are ‘embracing a world’ that is one and having ‘a moral responsibility for truth’. In this way the school has the potential to facilitate wisdom.

- **Staff**

One of the administrative staff indicated that he implements the *Moral Capabilities* by ‘loving where [he is], loving the people that [he works] with ... by creating an environment that is beautiful’.

The communication director indicated that he implements the moral capability about ‘managing one’s affairs and responsibilities with rectitude of conduct based on moral and ethical principles’ by striving ‘to be truly honest’ about what the school is about. He also stated that how he communicates with parents is extremely important. He mentions from the beginning that Gordon Naylor, the school’s founder, is a Bahá’í. He also mentions that the management at the school respect people from all religious backgrounds and appreciate differences. In this way, the communication director manages his affairs with rectitude of conduct as he talks about the belief of ‘importance of spirituality at the outset’.

The staff recognised that ‘it is real important in a classroom setting for a teacher to be really, really positive and acknowledge all the steps that children take towards wisdom’. This concept of encouragement facilitates the implementation of the *Moral Capabilities* in the classrooms. In a supportive and encouraging environment,

students are led to gain and analyse knowledge, learn from peers and think for themselves, always drawing inspiration from the *19 Moral Capabilities*. The students are given confidence to believe in their own strength to question, analyse and develop solutions.

In an English class, the example was given of the moral capability of valuing one's strengths and weakness, and evaluating one's ego as applied to the character of Hamlet. In this case, the students were encouraged to apply *Moral Capabilities* to Hamlet and assess which ones need a little more support. The teacher's remark was:

*They [students] need to realise that they can figure these things out, come with things they had never thought about before and therefore they know that they are smart or they are wise.*

The teachers believe they are creating 'a generation of wise children and people who are interested in increasing their wisdom'. They believe that by implementing the *Moral Capabilities* through constant revision and reference at appropriate opportunities, the students become aware of the moral guidelines.

- **Students**

Students referred to the structure and discipline of the school, and how the *Moral Capabilities* are incorporated in each class and the whole school environment. The clear moral framework was emphasised, as was how it helps to facilitate wisdom.

One of the students stated that:

*Here you focus on the moral character, you have guidelines to do that; it is sort of like a parenting school ... they [teachers] are like our parents for a while, like in classes we have many moral things that the teachers bring to us.*

The students remarked that the *Moral Capabilities* are incorporated into every class,

‘even Math class’. One student shared the example of how one of the *Moral Capabilities*, such as creating a sense of duty, would be encouraged by the teacher through taking proper notes in class and completing what one has to do for one’s lesson.

Students stated that NCCI’s goal was to facilitate wisdom for the students through the *Moral Capabilities*. The understanding and the application of the *Moral Capabilities* facilitate the correct behaviour, attitudes and skills needed to be a wise person. One student emphasised that ‘the whole idea of NCCI is about bringing wisdom to young people and showing them the *Moral Capabilities*’.

A more detailed analysis of the *19 Moral Capabilities* is provided in the Excursus in Appendix Three.

### **3. Employment of the technique of consultation**

- **Leadership group**

The founder explained that the concept of *consultation* from the perspective of the Bahá’í writings is quite different from what is prevalent in society at large. He maintained that most of the people think that *consultation* is about a forum where people give their suggestions from which one will be selected as the best solution to a problem. However, in his understandings, Bahá’u’lláh states something quite different. In explaining this, the founder referred to Bahá’í writings in which it says that if contention and disagreement are in the *consultation*, the truth will be withheld. But, if *consultation* is done in a respectful, loving and frank manner, the truth will appear. According to the founder, the truth which can appear is greater than the knowledge of the individual parts or even the combined knowledge of parts.

The effect of this type of *consultation* is apparent in the school system. When people

comment that the founder should be proud of the school, his answer is, 'I feel like a participant and every one of us is participating in this *consultation* about how true education and a true community of learning can develop'. This in turn means that both the teachers and the students see themselves as learners, together in a community, which is a basic step in the '*wisdom process*' for developing wisdom. The founder maintained that it is important to have humility and understand that everyone is going to learn something. He stated that even though everyone's talents, skills and knowledge are brought into play during *consultation*, the end result will be that 'something much greater than the combined number of these things is going to appear'.

- **Staff**

The staff are always in the process of investigation and research, consulting with other 'like minded organisations' in order to learn from them. The concept of *consultation* is regularly used in carrying out the school's activities:

*... the administrative team consults, there is a corporate board that consults, teachers and staff members consult regularly.*

The organisation of the school's information package is given as an example of implementing the instrument of *consultation*. In this instance, all the staff went through a series of consultative processes during which many changes occurred to the document. Although the process was time-consuming, it was seen as a positive experience, as the outcome of this *consultation* was greater than any one input.

One of the staff member's remarks was:

*I have never worked in an environment where things change so quickly. It is because of the consultative process and our willingness to move forward.*

There is a spirit of teamwork among the staff, who consult regularly and are willing to move forward, as they believe in what they are doing.

Dorm parents encourage *consultation* at evening gatherings after prayers. They seek the students' input into policies or guidelines for the dorm.

- **Students**

The students referred to the benefits of world dilemma discussions during their lessons. In one case, the teacher in a geography class presented the students with a dilemma about sweat shops in third world countries. The moral dilemma was about a woman who wanted to offer her expertise to one of these companies in which many people worked for long hours and were under-paid. This discussion about world issues helped the students form a more informed opinion. As one student remarked:

*I think afterwards, after hearing everybody's points of view and having a consultation on it, that was one way that I acquired some wisdom.*

The students commented on the technique of *consultation* at the school. They compared the experience of debates from past experiences to the ones they had at NCCI. Their former experience was one of shouting at each other to get their points across, and people arguing and becoming agitated. In the words of one student, 'I remember I took a Law class and people would get so frustrated and so mad, and at the end of a class they'd want to punch a wall in basically'. At NCCI, students were split into groups. The teacher instructed all by saying, 'You talk, then you point to somebody and then they're allowed to talk and nobody talks out of turn'. The simple rule and adherence to this rule guided the students to create 'a really quiet atmosphere' in which they were able to consult on world issues with respect and dignity.

The students discerned the difference between NCCI and their attendance in other schools. They claimed one of the causes of the depth of their relationships with their peers at NCCI was due to the facilitation of many opportunities for discussions and *consultations*:

*... like in other schools, it was more of 'hi call me let's go out for coffee'. Here there is discussion on the Bahá'í Faith, we have discussions on everything.*

The students stated that wisdom is facilitated through discussions and making plans about hypothetical issues in classes such as social sciences and geography, which enhance the students' understanding of the world's challenges and solutions to the world's problems.

#### **4. Mentorship and teachers as exemplars**

- **Leadership group**

It was stated that wisdom can be modelled by 'striving for virtues'. The *mentorship programme* allows the staff to be connected intimately with the students, and to be able to listen to them and help them become autonomous learners. Once the students become autonomous learners they can access guidance from the sacred writings, and understand God's will and purpose for the current age, which helps them to become very wise in the community.

- **Staff**

The *system of mentorship* is based on each staff member working on an individual level with six to eight students to be able to address their material, emotional and spiritual needs. During *mentorship*, the teachers not only review the *Moral Capabilities* but also 'really develop a one-on-one relationship with students'. The staff create a supportive environment for the students where 'they can feel safe,



where they can explore life in all its various aspects', and where the staff provide answers to their questions or guide them to find answers they don't have.

In order to be more effective in this process, the staff recognise that they need to be good role-models. Teachers indicated that they 'read the sacred writings daily' in order to receive guidance, and to base their teachings and standards on the writings. Teachers were conscious that it is through their examples that students learn, so if they are patient, tolerant and more generous in sharing their knowledge and insight, the students will be likewise.

The staff maintained that the *mentorship system* helps create a family environment, so that 'there is closeness here between the staff and the students'. The staff felt that this family environment is conducive to wisdom. As one of the staff member indicated:

*I don't think people can really learn unless they feel safe, they must take risks too, but they must feel like their mistakes are not held against them. I think that risk is an element of acquiring wisdom ... to be humble in the face of learning and to feel safe to say 'no I don't know this', 'I am happy to learn that', not just about academic things, but about the world around you and the people you interact with.*

The *mentorship system* allows the staff to mingle with students during out-of-class time, such as having lunch together. One of the staff remarked:

*... it seems like such a little thing, but I have had so many wonderful conversations when I have sat down with students and had lunch with them and said how do you really feel.*

The teachers expressed that they genuinely care about the students' affairs and their well-being.

The staff also appreciated the small size of the school (approximately 100 students), where the ratio of teachers to students in the classroom is not one to thirty or thirty-five. This allows the *mentorship* to continue in the classroom environment where each student's needs are attended to on a daily basis.

The two-way relationship established during the *mentorship scheme* also allows both the students and staff to freely express their opinions, and if the teachers have been in the wrong to admit their mistakes. One of the teachers remarked:

*... the students come to you and give you a hug and they are all very loving.  
It is like a family, they are all very close.*

Each student is interviewed before being accepted into the school, a process which, from the teachers' point of view, 'shows that we care about them at the school'. The school also has very strict policy on drugs.

One of the teachers acknowledged the variance in the teachers' capacity, however it was pointed out that all are striving to achieve the school's well-defined vision.

- **Students**

The students commented on the dynamic process of *mentorship* and how it has created a special bond between the staff and the students. One student remarked that 'the closer relationship with a teacher helps you' to gain wisdom. He stated that:

*We have some very wise teachers here. I think being in close contact with them is one of the great ways of acquiring wisdom.*

Students were totally taken with the relationship between the staff and students, describing it as 'amazing'. They spoke of their teachers as individuals who 'always seem to try their hardest to help the children with whatever problems they have to do'. They shared that teachers do their jobs in the class in a way that makes them

feel good and that the teachers' genuine spirit of service to the students is outstanding. The presence of the mentors, the school counselor, the study hall and the responsibility management committee show that the teachers genuinely care for the students. Teachers have never been heard to complain about their pay or what they dislike, rather the students have heard the teachers to say that they are here 'to learn from us as well'. They seem happy to be teaching the students, as maintained by student comments that 'they are happy with what they are doing, not for the money only' and 'the teachers all help. They are not here for the money'.

Referring to the importance of education and training of children from a Bahá'í perspective, one of the students remarked that 'half of this school is Bahá'í people, so they are like helping people so they are helping the Cause [Bahá'í Faith] by teaching children or youth'.

The school was referred to as 'interactive', where the staff worked with the students and the feedback channel was always open. The students described the classes as enjoyable and interesting, and not 'boring'. Teachers at the school were referred to as supportive, knowledgeable and wise, who 'have gained wisdom through experience'. The students considered being in such a school with such company would certainly assist them to gain wisdom and referred to their teachers as having 'confidence in their own strengths', thereby contributing to wisdom.

The students also considered teachers to be individuals who helped them to be good students, helped them when they were upset or sad or needed something, and taught them to be good people. Students claimed that 'teachers always want to help them learn and will even stay back to try and help them'.

Students also commented on the close social atmosphere with their peers and how they learn from each other's experience, which ultimately helps them to become wise.

## **5. Pursuing the guiding principle of Unity in Diversity**

- **Leadership group**

While the theme of the school is *Unity in Diversity*, the leadership group talked about this as a thread in all of their interviews, however, they did not make any comments that could be isolated specifically under this heading, which could be quoted separately from all of their other responses.

- **Staff**

The school environment created at NCCI encourages the understanding that all students as human beings are equal regardless of their ethnicity, class, colour or gender differences. The staff observed that the students 'all seem very close knit, very friendly to each other ... there doesn't seem to be a class system or anything'. The *Unity in Diversity* cornerstone was described as a good place 'to start learning and obtaining wisdom'. Another teacher noted that:

*... they have diversity in school and they promote it, and they promote moral standards, and they promote equality of people all across the board, men and women.*

The two annual festivals are locations for learning and implementing the concept of *Unity in Diversity*. Students are encouraged to perform individually or in groups. Whilst they are thinking about what they are going to do and how well they are going to perform, they also understand that they are part of a larger group, a diverse group.

In the words of one of the staff:

*They may be performing either song or dance. Everybody is doing kind of the same thing but nobody is doing exactly the same thing, and the richness and diversity of the group is really exciting. And they move to really deep appreciation of what other people are doing. And certainly by the end, by the time we are ready to perform it, they are feeling a bond, with all of the other people who are performing, they really come to an understanding of what Unity in Diversity is and how it moves in this school, and how it really should be in the world.*

It was stated that students usually have some ideas about competition and how destructive it can be, particularly its influence in the performing arts and how it can destroy an appreciation of other people's gifts.

- **Students**

'Being a Bahá'í at NCCI does not make one better than others', was the comment of one student who had observed the lack of prejudice. Referring to the school, a Bahá'í -inspired school comprised of many Bahá'í staff and students, this student stated:

*It's just no one's – despite what difference you have in religion it's all one, it's considered one here so really no one's better than the other.*

The students commented on one the effects of the concept of *Unity in Diversity*, and how the concept in itself allows students and staff to see have an open mind. The cultural and religious diversity helps broaden the students' perspectives. One student remarked that NCCI 'talks about unity a lot ... and that creates an open mind'. The students expressed joy at living with international students in a multicultural and multi-faith environment, saying 'you can call yourself 'internash' ... it is a good thing to know about so much else and to accept all the other religions and cultures'. The students remarked about the spirit of *Unity in Diversity* in the school, expressing

such sentiments as ‘In this school everybody is one group and they are like friends, and everybody helps others’.

The school’s residential format also was acknowledged as a positive experience in that it allowed the students to ‘learn a lot about how to live with other people’. As one student claimed, ‘just the fact that there are so many students from different cultures’ causes one to find something that unites all. The students enjoyed the fact that their relationships and conversations with each other were on much deeper levels, since the students could not be united on a popular music or a popular culture as they came from many different places and talked on completely different levels.

## **6. Employing creative dance/theatre workshops in service to the community, with the purpose of enhancing social, moral and spiritual understandings**

- **Leadership group**

The *creative dance/theatre workshops* are the practical component of the world citizenship classes which are compulsory at NCCI. The purpose of the *creative dance/theatre workshops* is to raise social, moral and spiritual understanding among the participants (who are the students performing) and the audience at these performances. Hence, these workshops allow the students to serve the community and enable them to apply wisdom at a profound level.

The founder saw service as one of the important components of wisdom. He strongly believed that when individuals arise to serve, ‘even if they don’t have all the knowledge components, it begins a dynamic of growth’, which in turn starts a thirst for knowledge, a thirst for skill, a thirst for how to better be able to serve. The founder referred to this process as ‘true glory for human beings’. He indicated that individuals feel most fulfilled when they are of service to other people and ‘their sense of fulfilment is greater depending on the level of selflessness’.

The world citizenship classes look at who is a world citizen, what is a world citizen and what the charter of human rights of the United Nations says. Students are able to assess themselves as individual human beings, and to understand what characteristics and actions lead one to abasement and what leads one to loftiness. In other words, how can one make wise choices in life? On another level, the students consider an individual's relationship not just to themselves but also to others, and on a third level, they consider how individuals can affect the community. For example, at the individual level, the issue of drug abuse and its negative aspects can be dealt with, and the positive qualities of those who do not use drugs can be emphasised. On the second level, the use of drugs and its influence on relationships is dealt with, and on the third level, the use of drugs in relationship to the world is dealt with. On a practical level, students learn dances that demonstrate the effects of drug abuse and show the positive side as well. Other subjects of the world citizenship classes also focus on the identity of a human being and how one learns as a spiritual being. The students look at current brain research, emotional intelligence and other factors to discuss these issues.

The practical component of this curriculum equips the student to serve the community, thus facilitating wisdom at a deep level. The example was given of the students travelling to Quebec for one week. The students were able to go from school to school, work with youths who had problems with suicide and abuse, and discuss issues on both a one-to-one level and a community level.

- **Staff**

The skills learnt and the capacities enhanced during *creative dance/theatre workshop* trainings and performances help the students to serve their communities. The staff

remarked that ‘certainly ‘workshop’ is another area where wisdom is developed’. Through the presentation of *dance/theatre workshops* such as dances that portray aspects of abuse, equality, unity, drugs and alcohol, students go through several levels of understanding from performance to education, to individual and community transformation. As one of the staff remarked:

*At first they think they are performing for people, then they think they are educating people, and then they realise that they are changing their own lives and developing wisdom about things.*

The dances are taken into high schools, prison, clubs, various institutions – ‘places where these issues are dealt with on a daily basis’. The dances evoke responses from the patrons who ask questions which, in turn, evoke fresh responses from the students that show their enhancement of understanding. After the students have performed a dance, ‘they are forced to talk about it, how it is different for them, how they apply it to their own school, so it becomes real for them’.

The two festivals held during the academic year – the fall showcase and the spring festival – provide another venue of expression for the students’ artistic developments. During these festivals the students’ creativity and imagination are nurtured, and they are supported and encouraged to perform in front of large audiences within given guidelines.

The drama students are taught tools, ‘the things they need to know and then they are taken out into the community’. When they are in the community, whether it is performance at another school working with their peers, with younger children, clubs, for the public, or a particular institution, the students are given the opportunity to see how their acquired skills work and they also receive feedback which is



necessary for their reflection and evaluation processes. Moreover, the drama teaching process provides an environment in which the students can discover realities for themselves and can have a sense of ownership.

All the staff seem to be involved and committed to what they are doing. ‘They care about students’ and help create an environment that facilitates learning with the ‘focus on arts and creativity which is necessary for discovery and learning about the world through your own eyes rather than some popular social cultural norm’. In this way, the students are helped to acquire their own wisdom.

- **Students**

The students perceived the *creative dance/theatre workshops* as a way of facilitating wisdom, as they assisted in the individual’s development. Students commented on how other students have changed through participation in *creative dance/theatre workshops*:

*... there’s workshop, it facilitates a lot of growth in people. You should see the difference, when people first come to workshop and when they leave.*

The students stated that the *creative dance/theatre workshops* focus on ‘bringing public awareness to school, elementary and retired home’s people’. The students are able to go into the community and talk about issues and consult on solutions. The feedback from the audience and the discussions on issues that follow are considered as modes of acquiring wisdom. These workshops were described as ‘an amazing experience’, which brings awareness to the students, who explained that when they start the workshops they are not sure what they are getting into. However, as they progress during the year, they become more familiar with the challenges of the people and society on a daily basis.

Students who were not Bahá'ís referred to the advantages of attending a Bahá'í - inspired school. They explained that the *Moral Capabilities* have helped them to 'be a better person; to know right from wrong'. They expressed that these issues are essential for the students' growth and help facilitate wisdom in young people.

Besides the *creative dance/theatre workshops* as vehicles of service, the students are required to complete fifty hours of service annually. The students viewed this compulsory requirement of service as a way to contribute to society by giving 'people a chance to serve the world' and, in turn, to be able to 'change [one's] personality' to become a better individual. Students perceived the service hours as 'opportunities to help the community'.

The students referred to a world citizenship curriculum that incorporates the *creative dance/theatre workshops*. During these sessions, wisdom is facilitated by staff in helping students to work in a multicultural environment and to share their skills with the community in a posture of learning.

## **7. Participating in morning assembly at school**

- **Leadership group**

The founder stated that the *morning assembly* 'ultimately was designed to have a communal experience to begin with'. The *morning assembly* affirms the oneness of the school, that everybody is one, that before we go to our classes 'we start together, we say prayers, we read readings together and we have a few moments to reflect why we are here and who we are'. The school makes a conscious effort to read writings from every different faith as well as different thinkers so that every student can feel that they have been acknowledged, and others have had the opportunity to reflect on

what they believe. Music and humour also form part of the *morning assembly* programmes.

The *morning assembly* is also an opportunity to make announcements so that everybody is 'on the same page'. It is an opportunity for the staff to share positive feedback about students' attitudes, behaviour and the school that has been received from other places. The assembly is a 'unifying moment', where the whole school reflects on their purpose so they can go about their business in a spiritual way.

The principal and vice-principal indicated that the *general assembly* consists of announcements, discussions, things that the students need to know for the day and week, and a series of devotions that are chosen and presented by the students who have volunteered for the task. The previous year, the mentor groups carried out the devotions, which provided the opportunity for the entire student body to participate in these on a daily basis. In the year of this study (2000), staff wanted to encourage students to volunteer. This was to be evaluated.

The purpose of the devotions is for the student to make a connection with God through prayer and meditation. Reference was made to the work of Daniel Goldmed on emotional intelligence and his discussion about the human brain, which resets itself on a daily basis through prayer and meditation. The work of Emilia Diamond was also referred to, in regard to the 'glee cells' in the brain that will grow and cause the student to learn faster when the environment is charged with love and joy.

It was mentioned that every evening, in the residence, there is family time or the community gathering together where prayers are shared before going to bed.

- **Staff**

Students are encouraged to form groups of four to five and, using their creativity and imagination, to conduct the devotional part of the *morning assembly* and perform in front of the whole school. The staff fully support the students' endeavours at the *morning assembly* by being present and following the instructions if there is audience involvement. One of the staff members stated that:

*It is very important for the group that is presenting, but also for the group that is seeing, because when it comes to their turn to present, they are going to be able to present something that is very creative, very imaginative and that will be welcomed, it will be accepted.*

This in turn promotes a safe environment for students and staff to be comfortable with who they are and not to be afraid of taking risks.

- **Students**

The *morning assembly* created a safe environment for students to share their faith and belief system. The students also considered the *morning assembly* as part of the school's focus on the development of moral character through a 'spiritual process'.

The students mentioned that the devotions during the *morning assembly* help them to learn a lot 'from all these really great people who have said something'. The students remarked that these readings and devotions are taken to heart, reflected upon and provide a source of learning that assists the facilitation of wisdom.

The students reflected that wisdom was facilitated in school through *morning assembly* multi-faith prayers, which are welcoming to students of different religious backgrounds. The prayers said at *morning assembly* were considered to help a lot of students, particularly as they are not 'biased' and the format and participation is

‘open to all religions. So if you are Muslim you don’t feel like “I cannot say my prayers here, I am not wanted”’.

## **Conclusion**

This examination of the participants’ views on the two questions, ‘Can children/youth acquire wisdom?’ and ‘What role do schools have in creating an environment where wisdom can be developed/acquired?’, has identified distinct categories depicting how children/youth can acquire wisdom in both theory and practice. This process or examination has also identified the ways in which the NCCI creates an environment that encourages and enables students to acquire wisdom. Perspectives of school leaders, including the founder, school staff (both teachers and staff from all other areas of the school such as administration and dorm parents) and a representative sample of students, both live-in and day students, were generally in agreement in their views.

They identified the following four sub-categories in examining the acquisition of wisdom in theory: a) *stimulus of innate wisdom* – participants referred to wisdom as innate potential that needs to be released; b) *learning through exploration* – participants alluded to acquisition of wisdom through strategies such as guided reflection, world dilemma discussions, observation and obedience; c) *reflection on experience* – participants referred to the importance of service and its practical connection with the values and beliefs of individuals; and d) *spiritual impulse* – participants considered wisdom to be given by God. Acquisition of wisdom was considered to take place in a conscientious person who also reflects on the sacred writings and has awakened spiritual senses which are connected with their ultimate source, God.

The participants identified the following seven sub-categories, within both the school and the broader community, in examining the acquisition of wisdom in practice: a) *promoting spiritual awareness* in the school environment; b) *implementing the 19 Moral Capabilities*; c) *employing the technique and structure of consultation*; d) *implementing the concept of mentorship*; e) *upholding the principle of Unity in Diversity*; f) *the use of arts through dance and theatre workshops to enhance social, moral and spiritual understandings*; and g) *structure and participation in morning assemblies*, which enable children/youth to acquire wisdom by seeking their views about the school environment and its conduciveness to its students' acquisition of wisdom.

One of the major points was the emphasis on the family atmosphere, in which students and staff are essentially 'friends', and students can make mistakes without fear of ridicule or punishment, thus encouraging open discussion and investigation in the quest for knowledge. There is a heavy emphasis on the principle of *Unity in Diversity*, so that students from many different races and cultural backgrounds accept each other as equals and are free to learn in a non-threatening, respectful environment. Moral learning is valued equally with academic learning, the *19 Moral Capabilities* place great emphasis on relationships and decision-making, and service to the community is highly valued. Having a clearly identified school philosophy, known to all at the school, is seen as a valuable tool in creating a unified Bahá'í-inspired environment conducive to the acquisition of wisdom. This tool, the *19 Moral Capabilities*, influences all teaching and learning at the school, as well as the social atmosphere. The *Capabilities* are interwoven into all classes, whether scientific or artistic. A full guide to the *19 Moral Capabilities* is provided in Appendix Three.

The final chapter, Chapter Nine, summarises the essential features of wisdom education in Bahá'í schooling, as found in this study, and provides suggestions for future research.

## Chapter Nine: Essential Features of Wisdom Education in Bahá'í Schooling

This thesis has articulated a complex set of concepts that describe wisdom and its development in individuals. The major focus of the research was a Bahá'í perspective of wisdom education but the explication was formulated in a comparative framework derived from a study of other perspectives on wisdom. An exploration of wisdom and wisdom education in general has highlighted the significance of wisdom in several fields of study, both secular (philosophy and psychology) and religious (Biblical and Bahá'í). Representative voices from these fields – Socrates (philosophy), Sternberg (psychology), *Proverbs* (Biblical) and Bahá'í writings (Bahá'í) – suggest the relevance of wisdom education in contemporary society.

The focused ethnography conducted at Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute (NCCI), a Bahá'í-inspired school in Stratford, Canada, provided an example of how wisdom can be acquired in schools where the development of students' innate qualities of integrity, love, compassion and wisdom are both recognised and nurtured. NCCI's emphasis on the twin pillars of 'achieving academic excellence' within a 'clear moral framework' has highlighted the significance of educating and training both the material and the spiritual aspects of human beings. The thesis has observed and described in detail how the concepts and processes of wisdom education in the wider conceptual context are evident in the vision, philosophy, curricular and interpersonal education in a Bahá'í-inspired school. This research has found that a common tenet of quite diverse schools of thought and world views concurred on the opinion that nurturing the innate qualities of the spirit contributes to the development of the wisdom that resides in individuals.



The thesis has identified the acquisition of both material and spiritual knowledge as a basic educational process, not only as a core concept of Bahá'í philosophy, but also as a potential concept for both secular and other religious traditions. Schools, through wisdom education, can play a significant role in not only nurturing and releasing individuals' innate powers, but also in channelling their students' collective energies toward the nurturing of local, national and international communities as agencies of justice and peace. Thus, wisdom education can assist individuals to establish a pattern of life that not only promotes the individual's material and spiritual development, but also contributes toward building a peaceful, unified world.

This thesis has also highlighted that the wisdom education process in Bahá'í schools is a distinct and valuable form of education, worthy of consideration by contemporary educational systems. Wisdom education in Bahá'í schools illustrates the value of wisdom as a spiritual dimension of the person, the development of which is conducive to moral justice. Human beings' spiritual dimension is not understood narrowly within a specific religious framework but within the broader context of basic human spirituality. Wisdom education informed by Bahá'í teachings asserts that human beings are essentially spiritual beings in which body, mind and spirit are interrelated dimensions of their reality. The phenomenal world is a means of gaining access to spiritual reality. Enhanced spiritual perception has the potential to motivate students to seek 'the good', and to make right choices in their lives.

Attention has been drawn to the necessity for a wisdom education that enables individuals to recognise the need for an enhanced understanding of their moralities and capacities. Wisdom education is not based solely on transferring knowledge or creating a fixed pattern of behaviour in individuals; rather it nurtures flexibility and

inner growth in order to attend to the requirements of a constantly changing society. The knowledge of both material and spiritual realms, as well as the capability to reflect on situations and decisions made, enables individuals to go beyond a narrow definition of virtues. For example, a deeper understanding of ‘wisdom in practice’ enhances the capacity for service to be carried out with purity of motive and humility. Individuals exercising ‘wisdom in practice’ are not as likely to pursue their own selfish interests. They are more likely to assist in reviving the world and regenerating people through their spiritual commitment to nurturing their own innate good qualities and contributing selflessly to the welfare of society.

A major contribution of this thesis has been the identification of an understanding of wisdom in education as a five-step process identified as the ‘*wisdom process*’. The key stages of that process are highlighted in the following section.

### **The ‘*wisdom process*’ in education**

After repeated critical analysis of the data, it became apparent that the facilitation of wisdom in NCCI is an educational process. This educational process involves five stages of development called the ‘*wisdom process*’, which includes:

#### **1. Recognition of innate capacity**

- The recognition of wisdom as an innate capacity within each individual, acknowledging that the ultimate source of this innate capacity of wisdom is God.

The analysis of the data indicated that recognition of the innate capacity to be wise gives a new perspective and purpose to an individual’s life. The recognition of a human being as a composition of body, mind and soul highlights the need not only for material but also spiritual education. NCCI demonstrated that it was possible to put into practice the Bahá’í belief that a human being is a mine which is rich in gems

of great value, one of which is wisdom. The staff of NCCI believed in the students' inherent wisdom potential. It was observed that this belief engendered a motivating force to awaken and activate the innate capacity for wisdom.

## **2. Stimulus of innate wisdom**

- Stimulus of the innate wisdom capacity through thinking, studying and exploring fields of both spiritual and material knowledge.

In order to awaken and mobilise this innate wisdom capacity, the teacher's role is to draw out the wisdom potential within each student. Education and training awaken and mobilise this innate capacity through thinking, investigating, studying and exploring fields of both material and spiritual knowledge. NCCI's commitment to academic excellence within a clear moral framework provided a fertile ground for investigating and exploring the fields of both material and spiritual knowledge in order to stimulate the individual's innate wisdom. Interviews with NCCI current and former students supported this claim.

## **3. Acquired understanding**

- The acquired understanding of the spiritual and material worlds, which increases the potential for good in individual and collective lives.

Evidence was found in the focused ethnography that once wisdom education is awakened through the education stimuli, the individual's understanding of concepts and situations is enhanced. This enhanced understanding is informed by spiritual and material knowledge about the spiritual and material worlds, and their interconnectedness. Informed and equipped with both spiritual and material knowledge, the individual is cognisant of the positive potential of this enhanced understanding for that individual and for society. NCCI's mentoring system, the

world dilemma discussions in the classrooms, and consultation on issues of world citizenship among other methods, encouraged the students to gain a deeper understanding of both material and spiritual concepts in actual social contexts that are encountered on a daily basis.

#### **4. Making moral and life decisions**

- Making informed and beneficial moral and life decisions based on the acquired understanding that becomes an integral part of the person's life experience.

NCCI's curriculum is grounded in the assumption that an informed individual is moved to make life decisions based on honesty, integrity and justice. The acquired understanding furnishes the individual with the ability to make ethical decisions that effect and shape their life, and contribute to an evolving society characterised by justice and peace. The school's system of dance/theatre workshops, focusing on social issues in particular, offered many opportunities for the students to choose to re-enact moral, life decisions that would assist them to grow individually and contribute to their communities. The students chose to be involved, consulted on the current social issues, and decided to portray a solution through their creative energies in drama and dance.

#### **5. Reflection on action**

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

The *19 Moral Capabilities* taught and propagated by the school system, in particular the mentoring technique, offered guided reflection opportunities for the students to make better decisions in the future. Students were then supported to seek additional knowledge to make more informed and constructive decisions. Principled decisions

made conscientiously for the betterment of the world and its inhabitants engender new levels of understanding, which can be used to plan the next cycle of the study in search of additional knowledge to generate future decisions.

### **Correlation of the ‘*wisdom process*’ with the conceptual framework**

As well as generating the ‘*wisdom process*’, this thesis has generated a conceptual framework derived from the representative voices of Socrates, Sternberg, *Proverbs* and Bahá’í writings from the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, Biblical studies and the Bahá’í Faith. In general, several points of connection were found between the essential characteristics of wisdom in the representative voices and the ‘*wisdom process*’ identified in Bahá’í education. These were discussed in detail in Chapter Seven and are summarised here.

#### **1. Recognition of innate capacity**

In the ‘*wisdom process*’, Socrates and *Proverbs*, a direct connection is made between wisdom and God as the ultimate source of innate wisdom in the individual. Socrates, *Proverbs*, the ‘*wisdom process*’ and the Bahá’í writings acknowledge that the source of wisdom is God, and that divine wisdom is greater than human wisdom. Although Sternberg does not comment on the source of wisdom, he talks about the necessity for human beings to appreciate common universal values and the desire to work for the common good as vital prerequisites for seeking wisdom.

#### **2. Stimulus of innate wisdom**

All three representative voices and the Bahá’í writings concur with the ‘*wisdom process*’ in that education is needed for the development of wisdom. The ‘*wisdom process*’ and the Bahá’í writings view education as drawing out or nurturing the innate good qualities of every human being, based on the assumption that all human

beings have been created good and all human beings have the capacity to acquire wisdom. The '*wisdom process*' and the Bahá'í writings also emphasise that education should be facilitated through the study of both spiritual and material stimuli and knowledge. The necessity of acquisition of both spiritual and material education is of the utmost importance to the process of seeking and acquiring wisdom.

Socrates maintains that wisdom can be developed through the individual's intellect. The investigation of truth, which Socrates pursued passionately and encouraged all to do, can be achieved through human understanding. Sternberg identifies three ways of developing wisdom: the first through the proper application of knowledge for the benefit of common good; the second through explicit teaching of wisdom skills in schools; and third, through observance of wise adults as role models.

### **3. Acquired understanding**

Socrates and the Bahá'í writings maintain that human beings, through their intellect or gift of understanding that is inherent in every individual, can investigate the truth and enhance their understandings of the inner realities of created things. In addition, Socrates perceives wisdom as the development of the capacity to understand that the essence of divine wisdom is ultimately beyond human comprehension, a concept supported by the Bahá'í writings.

Sternberg's proposal of identifying three ways of acquiring wisdom is similar to the need for both spiritual and material knowledge. The first way recommended by Sternberg – proper application of knowledge for the benefit of the common good – is an outcome of knowledge that is based on not only acquisition of sciences and arts, but also on the understanding of a human being as a moral being. Being able to apply

knowledge for the benefit of others necessitates an understanding of both the material and moral/ethical needs of an individual.

The other two modes of acquiring wisdom recommended by Sternberg – explicit teaching of wisdom skills at schools and the observance of wise adults as role models – correlate in essence with the ‘*wisdom process*’ and the focus of this thesis.

According to *Proverbs*, the acquisition of wisdom occurs by both learning the truths of reality handed down by the wisdom tradition and by exploring afresh the inner reality of things in the natural world. Once again there is a close correlation between *Proverbs* and the ‘*wisdom process*’ in the acquisition of wisdom. The necessity of obtaining both spiritual and material knowledge in order to acquire wisdom from the perspective of the ‘*wisdom process*’ is similar to the underlying tenet of acquiring wisdom according to *Proverbs*. Learning the truths of reality handed down by the wisdom tradition and exploring the inner reality of things in the natural world is likened to the exploration and study of both spiritual and material knowledge, especially since an a priori for acquiring wisdom in *Proverbs* is ‘the fear of God’.

#### **4. Making moral life decisions**

The recognition of God as the source of wisdom and the required attitude of awe before God is a point of connection between Socrates, *Proverbs*, the ‘*wisdom process*’ and the Bahá’í writings. The integration of this understanding with the above understanding of the necessity of acquisition of both spiritual and material knowledge leads to the necessity of helping students develop spiritual perception, which forms part of wisdom education. Spiritual perception equips individuals to have a sense of morality and an obligation to promote the common good when consciously making moral decisions about the issues of life, both personal and social.

Spiritual perception also clarifies the individuals' vision about the need for individual and collective growth toward a civilisation based on justice and peace rather than self interest. Sternberg is also of the view that the moral dimension of wisdom is to understand that universal values common to all religions are an integral part of wise thinking. Spiritual perception, gained through the investigation and learning of both spiritual and material knowledge, helps individuals to make constructive moral decisions.

### **5. Reflection on action**

The '*wisdom process*', *Proverbs*, Socrates and the Bahá'í writings value reflection on the individual's action. Reflection on one's experience, which includes decisions made and actions taken, enables the individual to gain a new level of understanding. This enhanced understanding assists in planning the exploration of additional knowledge and how decisions can be made better. *Proverbs* maintains that the person who possesses wisdom has the capacity to make moral decisions that go beyond the following of traditional religious laws or social mores. According to *Proverbs*, the '*wisdom process*', Socrates and the Bahá'í writings, reflection on experience includes deliberation on divine moral standard and divine wisdom, rather than human-made standards. What needs to be taken into account is the understanding that the essence of divine wisdom is beyond the comprehension of individuals, which in turn leads to humility before God and His creation.

### **The practice of wisdom education in NCCI**

The analysis of the data revealed that for wisdom to be acquired in a school environment, a mechanism needs to be employed that will stimulate the innate wisdom within each student. This analysis discovered that the acquisition of



knowledge from elders, God and the environment are only stages within the '*wisdom process*', and the school needs a system through which it can implement this process.

The educational methods and structures the school devises pave the way for the facilitation of wisdom for its students. Wisdom in Bahá'í schools is a distinctive educational process.

Seven sub-categories emerged through the data analysis that demonstrated the system through which wisdom education is enabled at NCCI, as summarised below.

- 1) *Promoting spiritual awareness* raises the students' consciousness that each individual is innately good, worthy and capable of manifesting all the good qualities of God. The recognition of the innate worth of all individuals at the school helps students' full potential to be realised through mutual respect and cooperation. NCCI also holds the belief that the nurturing of the human spirit, and having a relationship with God and spirituality is an important consideration for the students' overall development. Thus, the belief is that education and training should acknowledge the human being as a composite of body, mind and soul, seeking and implementing both material and spiritual knowledge. This sub-category is correlated closely with the first step of the '*wisdom process*', where the recognition of wisdom as an innate capacity and its ultimate source as God is of the utmost importance.
- 2) *Implementing the 19 Moral Capabilities*, which are based on the model of service, enhances the students' understanding of the concepts and the implementation of capabilities for moral decision-making. Staff name the students' actions during regular classes and other activities, pointing out their capabilities and strengths. The personal transformation programme within the world citizenship curriculum helps the students develop a sense of well-being. The students are taught and assisted to acquire sound decision-making practices, and develop their communication skills to establish healthy human relationships according to the students' values and beliefs. As part of the staff development programme, teachers develop strategies to incorporate the *Moral Capabilities* in the curriculum. The clear moral framework, consisting of the *19 Moral Capabilities*, allows the staff to facilitate the application of the capabilities necessary to develop the staff and the students as world citizens. This sub-category correlates with the second, third and fourth steps of the '*wisdom process*', stimulus and study, acquired understanding and decision-making. The implementation of the *Moral Capabilities*

provides a nurturing environment where the innate wisdom is stimulated through studying both material and spiritual knowledge. Such nurturing enhances the students' understanding of their personal growth and their role as world citizens.

- 3) *Employing the technique of consultation*, with the spirit of utmost love, dignity, frankness and respect is another mechanism through which NCCI facilitates wisdom education. Both the teachers and students see themselves as learners and put forward their ideas without attachment to their own interests. The truth is sought through offering differing perspectives with the above mentioned attitude. The belief held by NCCI is that the result of the consultation is greater than the sum total of what the participants contribute to it.

Consultation happens at all levels in the school. All staff consult, the board consults, dorm parents encourage consultation, and students consult and offer suggestions to the school. The purpose of consultation is to seek the truth. The students discern that the opportunities for discussion and consultation at the school contribute towards the acquisition of wisdom. This sub-category correlates with the second and third steps of the '*wisdom process*', stimulus and study, and acquired understanding. Consultation on matters results in stimulating the innate wisdom capacity to develop through seeking knowledge and also through gaining deeper understanding of the concepts being consulted upon. The process of consultation is especially associated with the fifth step of the '*wisdom process*', reflection on experience. Consultation results in reflection on decisions made and enables the individual to gain a new level of understanding about the matter at hand. It also throws light on what additional knowledge one needs to obtain in order to make a better decision next time.

- 4) *Mentorship with teachers as exemplars* is another device NCCI uses to facilitate wisdom. The mentorship programme is a component of the world citizenship curriculum. The mentorship programme helps create a family environment in which students are assisted with developing moral leadership. The teachers who counsel and guide students as mentors assist in the student's social, moral and educational development by meeting the student on a one-to-one basis and setting specific goals. The staff are aware that they need to be good role-models themselves in order to make their work as role models effective. The virtue of humility is of great importance, since staff consider themselves learners who strive for excellence. This sub-category correlates with the fourth and fifth steps of the '*wisdom process*', decision-making and reflection on experience. The mentoring assists the students to make constructive life decisions, based

on their understanding that has been achieved through consultation with the mentor. Mentoring also provides guided reflection on the decisions and actions that students have taken. Through guided reflection, mentoring provides assistance with enhancing the students' understanding to know what additional knowledge should be sought in order to make better decisions in the future.

- 5) *Pursuing the guiding principle of Unity in Diversity* is manifested through the diverse school population, with students coming from Africa, USA, Canada, Europe and the South Pacific, among other regions. The world citizenship curriculum, which consists of three components, namely the mentorship programme, world citizenship courses and the NCCI service and performing arts workshops, provides a foundation for developing a global ethic and the practice of world citizenship. The school promotes the concept of equality of human beings regardless of their ethnicity, class, colour or gender differences. Through its world citizenship curriculum, NCCI promotes a deep appreciation among students of what other students stand for and do. This sub-category correlates with the first and second steps of the '*wisdom process*', innate capacity, and stimulus and study. Above all, the principle of *Unity in Diversity* acknowledges the innate potential of all human beings. Through the implementation of the principle of *Unity in Diversity*, NCCI has demonstrated the belief that all students have the innate capacity for wisdom irrespective of their ethnic, class or religious backgrounds. This principle recognises that this innate wisdom needs to be stimulated and nurtured through the world citizenship curriculum, which facilitates both material and spiritual knowledge.
- 6) *Employing creative dance/theatre workshops in service to the community*, with the purpose of enhancing social, moral and spiritual understandings, is another device through which NCCI facilitates wisdom. These workshops are a component of the world citizenship curriculum. Participants in these workshops learn and perform dances/drama that re-enact current social issues such as substance abuse, Unity in Diversity, equality of men and women, and elimination of prejudice. The workshops draw students and staff together in a consultation process. The outcome of the consultation is service to the wider local, state, national and international communities, which enables the school to apply wisdom at a deep, reflective level. NCCI considers service to be an important component of wisdom, fulfilling the aspirations of individuals to be of service to others. The creative dance/theatre workshops contribute towards the acquisition of wisdom by the performers and the audience, and enhance individual and community transformation. This sub-category is correlated closely with the fourth and fifth steps of the '*wisdom*

*process*', decision-making and reflection on experience. Participation in the creative dance/theatre workshops requires (as the first step) the identification of social issues through consultation. The students' decisions are made based on their understanding of the social problems and how they can contribute towards their betterment. After performance, the students have the opportunity to reflect on the decisions they made whilst consulting, performing and interacting with the audience. The teacher's or the mentor's guidance enables the students to gain a new level of understanding, and to seek additional knowledge and skill for making better decisions in the future.

- 7) *Participating in morning assembly at school* facilitates wisdom through an inspirational method. The twenty-minute morning assembly provides an environment where prayers and readings from various sacred scriptures are shared in a reverent atmosphere. The assembly also creates a joyful and cooperative atmosphere because it serves as an opportunity for artistic expression through the presentation of poetry, music and dance. The activities at the assembly help the students to share their knowledge, and provide an opportunity for reflection on what is read and performed. The staff share positive feedback about the students' attitudes and behaviour, which encourages the students and also serves as a reflective moment for all. This sub-category correlates in particular with the first and second steps of the '*wisdom process*', innate capacity, and stimulus and study. Through the morning assembly's devotional section, the school acknowledges the understanding that individuals are spiritual human beings who need to be nurtured, not only materially but also spiritually. Morning assemblies provide the nurturing of the innate wisdom capacity within each individual and acknowledge that the ultimate source of this innate capacity is God.

All the sub-categories are interrelated, not only with each other but also with all the steps of the '*wisdom process*'. Some of the sub-categories, however, are more closely correlated with specific steps of the '*wisdom process*'. The understanding of the '*wisdom process*' and the practice of the educational process in relation to wisdom education are capacity-building practices. During schooling, the students are accompanied by teachers and mentors who guide their steps lovingly but firmly, accept their mistakes and build their confidence. All these steps are taken with the view of enabling students to render service to the world of humanity. Once the

students graduate from the school, they should be able to apply the steps of the '*wisdom process*' independently in their everyday life, with the twofold purpose of personal transformation and contributing to the betterment of the world.

### **Implication of wisdom education**

Wisdom education not only prepares children and youth to achieve academic excellence, but also enables them to gain spiritual values that will assist them to face their life opportunities and challenges. Equipped with both academic achievements and spiritual values, the youth can provide wise leadership among their contemporaries in the community. Wisdom education empowers children and youth to help transform society, not only through the power of reason but also the power of faith.

Wisdom education stimulates youth to be individuals who exemplify high moral and ethical standards. Wisdom education causes individuals' innate capacities to be developed in the context of service to the world of humanity. Children and youth can gain the volition to transform themselves and society for the better through wisdom education. To achieve this end, they need to understand the forces that shape individual and institutional behaviour, and the material and spiritual powers needed to transform their ideals. Knowledge, volition and commitment to action will help the youth become wise and achieve their goals.

Bahá'í schools adopt a conscious stance in relation to wisdom education. In Bahá'í schools, the posture of learning takes into account not only academic learning but also spiritual learning. The purpose of education in Bahá'í schools is to equip the individual to grow individually as well as to contribute to the welfare of humanity.

## **Future research**

Three future studies are suggested to advance the understanding of wisdom education as articulated in this thesis. The first would be to follow up NCCI graduates to discern the long-term impact of such a concentrated approach to wisdom education. The focus of this research would be to gauge the graduates' understanding about the concept of wisdom, and to discern how intentional wisdom education has contributed to their lives and to society. The research would take into consideration the impact of the school's philosophy, which promotes 'achieving academic excellence' within a 'clear moral framework' through the facilitation of the *19 Moral Capabilities*. The seven sub-categories identified in this thesis, which demonstrate a mechanism for wisdom education in NCCI, would form the basis of more focused questions to identify their correlation with the acquisition of wisdom and their implication in the graduates' lives.

The second study would be to construct a wisdom education curriculum framework through an extended, focused ethnographic study that would include a diverse range of Bahá'í or Bahá'í-inspired schools. An expanded study of wisdom education in practice has the potential to provide a wide range of curriculum perspectives that could be used to construct alternative curriculum models for wisdom education. In carrying out this study, the five step '*wisdom process*' developed in this thesis could be tested against the new participants' perceptions. Also of interest would be the study of the different mechanisms other schools use to promote wisdom education. Those findings could then present an enhanced theory of wisdom education that would provide the conceptual basis for a new wisdom education curriculum.

The third suggested study would be to examine how these Bahá'í-inspired core principles of a wisdom curriculum can be translated into curricula in secular schools and other religious schools. With the contemporary consideration of emerging concepts of secular spirituality and the development and engendering in students of spiritual values and principles, the model of wisdom education discerned in this thesis also offers a valuable opportunity for exploring wisdom education in a wide range of contemporary schools in Australia.

Tacey (2000, p. 1) states that 'Australian attitudes towards spirituality appear to be undergoing a profound and dramatic change'. There seems to be a yearning and a quest for spirituality among contemporary youth that is quite separate from traditional religious affiliations. Tacey's (2000, p. 3) ideas extend beyond the limited concept of religion classes permitted in some secular schools, to refer to a new spirituality in Australia that is latent or emerging in numerous fields of study in schools. The concept of wisdom education has the potential to be interwoven in all subject areas, awakening a sense of moral responsibility in students towards each other, the earth and humanity. Whether students are attending a math, science, history or English class, they will be able to discern a deeper purpose in their education and how they might use the acquired knowledge, insights and skills to transform themselves as individuals and to offer selfless service to their fellow human beings.

## **Conclusion**

The Bahá'í approach to wisdom education is strongly premised on the belief that it enables the individual's knowledge and skills to transform various fields of study and solve many problems that are currently disrupting society. The execution of Bahá'í -

inspired wisdom education acknowledges the intellectual, social and spiritual capacities latent in the human race, with the assumption that this is a critical factor in awakening and animating the spiritual faculties of the human world, and helping humanity's desperate need for the establishment of peace and justice. This is conducted in a faith context that acknowledges the oneness of the human race.

Bahá'í wisdom education seeks to answer the material civilisation's yearning for its soul, and to contribute constructively to global unification and social betterment.

This study found that students who had experienced this very deliberate approach in their formal and informal education to engender wisdom reflected beliefs and life goals that were congruent with the tenets or goals just outlined.

Following the evidence generated from observing and engaging with these students, this thesis concludes that valuing and explicitly developing a deliberate approach to wisdom education has the potential to contribute to a redefinition of the nature and processes of civilisation. Core to such wisdom education is the need for emphasising the spiritual awareness and responsibility of each individual, and the need to enable humans to become more conscious of their oneness.



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## Appendix One: The Meaning of Wisdom and Wise Actions - Tables 1 & 2

**Table 1: Meaning – Wisdom is ...**

	<b>Moral discernment/justice</b>	<b>Capacity to think &amp; reflect</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Spiritual awareness</b>	<b>Understanding of the world</b>	<b>Ability to make decisions</b>
<b>Founder</b>	‘Wisdom has to do with becoming as knowledgeable as you can be about virtues, qualities and capabilities as well as arts and sciences and apply it and make it manifest in this world.’					
<b>Principal and Vice-principal</b>				<p>‘Wisdom is trying to live one’s life based on the guidance from God.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is needing to know about my potential nobility.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is needing to know that the purpose in my life is to serve the body of mankind.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is being able to recognise wholeness.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is spiritual in nature...wisdom is letting go of one’s own intellect and allowing God to direct one... wisdom does not belong to oneself but is of comfort to oneself.’</p>		

<p><b>Staff</b></p>	<p>Wisdom 'is to be able to judge between right and wrong.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is to have experience and to be able to see the outcome of actions.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is having the experience and understanding to respond to something in a way that reflects the highest self.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is being close to the truth.'</p>		<p>'Wisdom is knowledge of many things which are used and distributed.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is knowledge used for good.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is experience and knowledge acquired over time.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is the acquisition of knowledge, spiritual knowledge or spiritual truths and applying it to one's life so that it will profit both oneself and others.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is a method by which one can achieve a goal.'</p>		<p>'Wisdom comes from balance between the intellect, emotion, interpersonal and social aspects and experience.'</p>	<p>'Wisdom is the ability to make decisions...to bring harmony to all through one's decisions.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is the ability to make decisions in a variety of situations based on a number factors like knowledge, emotion, gut feeling, empathy...'</p> <p>'Wisdom consists of three parts, base knowledge, justice and the ability to make decisions.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is the ability to know when to do what.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is the intuitive ability to make decisions from experiences.'</p>
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<p><b>Students</b></p>		<p>‘Wisdom is the deeper meaning of a concept.’</p> <p>‘... the ability to think for yourself would also be another one.’</p> <p>‘One of the elements of their personality is that they don’t just listen to everything that a person says. They try and have their own opinion and they try and be open minded, but at the same time they don’t just go with the crowd every time.’</p>	<p>‘Wisdom is knowledge about many things.’</p> <p>‘Knowledge I think would be a big one...’</p> <p>‘I think an understanding of maybe a kind of like a thirst for knowledge, to be open to it.’</p>	<p>‘Wisdom is an inner truth, not something you learn, something you have, that is in you...it comes from your soul...’</p> <p>‘I define wisdom as the knowledge of maybe this world. Spiritually I think it is the understanding of God, to be close to Him.’</p>	<p>‘Knowledge is stuff that you know, wisdom is how to apply it to life.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is like evaluating something and seeing which would be the best course of action in the circumstance, or even in a conversation...’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is a mix of knowledge, not just knowledge, I think life experience too...’</p> <p>‘They have an understanding of the way the world works...’ . ‘...they would be able to conduct themselves and would be able to advise others on how to conduct themselves in a way that would be appropriate to a situation.’</p>	<p>‘Wisdom is a mix of your experiences and your knowledge that you use to make decisions about things that happen in life.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is logic, the ability to solve problems.’</p>
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**Table 2: Component – Wise action ...**

	<b>Moral action</b>	<b>Other focused</b>	<b>Critical reflection</b>	<b>Enquiry oriented</b>
<b>Founder</b>	<p>‘Constellation of values are required for wisdom.’</p> <p>‘To have purity of motive.’</p> <p>‘Producing beauty in our lives.’</p>	<p>‘...absolute selflessness – to be able to look after the best interest of the other person.’</p> <p>‘The act of service which begins a dynamic of growth, starts a thirst for knowledge and a thirst for skill and starts joy and happiness of being of benefit.’</p>	<p>‘...ability to reflect on situations.’</p> <p>‘...to be measured and use moderation.’</p> <p>‘To be balanced in thinking.’</p>	
<b>Principal and vice-principal</b>	<p>Wisdom is ‘obedience to the Will of God.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is spiritual rather than something that one would acquire over the course of their life time. I hope that we become more wise and that is because if you become more in touch with your spiritual nature and closer to God and if you are directed if you allow yourself to let go of your own intellect and get in touch with your spiritual nature with regard to your belief in God, then I think you have some guidance that allows you to tap into your wisdom that isn’t really your own but is one that is of comfort for you.’</p> <p>‘Application of knowledge and timing and the ability to speak in a certain way with certain words. Certain way for example in the context of school is encouragement of the youth instead of reprimand.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is needing to know that the concept of trustworthiness moves beyond the traditional sense...trustworthiness for the application of wisdom, from the</p>	<p>Wisdom is ‘something that facilitates well-being for others.’</p> <p>‘The ability to know when the encouragement from the time extent is required and the ability to apply it utilising words as, Bahá’u’lláh says ‘soft as milk’, may have a significant effect.’</p>	<p>‘Recognition as a Bahá’í that all people of the planet are one and they are one body if you will, so the learning of any particular part of that body, for instance myself as a cell in the body of mankind, what is wise would be for me to make choices that would affect in a positive way the whole, the whole body of mankind...’</p>	

	Bahá'í perspective, through my eyes is recognising that I have to apply trustworthiness to every soul and individual that I meet.'			
<b>Staff</b>	<p>Wise people are 'soft spoken and non-confrontational.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is making systematic strategic choices based on understanding.'</p> <p>'Application of moral capabilities, or some sense of balance that has been achieved by the individual' is the component of wisdom.</p> <p>'A wise person would be compassionate, understanding, have vision and is comfortable with herself.'</p> <p>'A wise person gives advice, is knowledgeable and is trustworthy.'</p> <p>Some components of wisdom are 'being able to apply justice and fairness and being perceptive.'</p>	<p>A wise person 'observes others.'</p> <p>'Acceptance makes you wise.'</p> <p>'A wise person is patient, firm, gives reasons for the boundaries set, recognises that each individual is different and dealing with students differently, according to their capacities.'</p> <p>'Respecting the innate nobility of all people.'</p> <p>'Realising the oneness of humankind.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is the ability to make choices that benefit everyone.'</p> <p>'Being able to see outside one's self interest is a very large component.'</p> <p>'Being able to see things in the long term, being able to see an event from other people's perspectives, how they would interpret it.'</p>	<p>'I think an important component is detachment, being able to remove yourself from a situation enough to look at and really reflect on the meaning of situations and the dynamics of things, the meaning of what you are doing, of what is going on around you.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is making choices based on reflection and prayer.'</p> <p>They have grown enough in maturity over the years that they can be very wise in what they are saying. If I talked to you and I thought that you were a mature person, I would know that you would talk to me from your heart and not just from your head.</p> <p>'Understanding that souls can reflect the attributes of God.'</p> <p>'A wise person is a good listener and reflective.'</p> <p>'To have good countenance, realise that we are responsible and see negative events as positive opportunities for spiritual growth.'</p> <p>'Two other aspects of wisdom are timeliness and patience.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is what happens when we are reflecting on our actions.'</p> <p>'Wisdom is the reflection, learning from experience and planning.'</p>	<p>To be able 'to independently investigate the truth.'</p> <p>'To acquire both religious and scientific concepts and ideas.'</p>

			<p>‘Wisdom is not only knowing but understanding the background of situations and circumstances independently.’</p>	
<b>Students</b>	<p>‘They help people often when they have troubles. Not as a preacher, but as someone who really wants to help, who can help.’</p> <p>‘A wise person would use truthfulness, and also tactfulness, which is not being offensive or defensive in what they say, and a confident person in what they are saying.’</p> <p>‘A wise person is not talkative, he does what he says.’</p> <p>‘...because I think being spiritual is a part of wisdom, when you’re spiritual you are more like one unit with your body, with your brain so you’re more wise.’</p> <p>‘A wise person is an astute person, who has life experience, knowledge, justice and good social relationships.’</p>	<p>‘A wise person will be considerate and will not impose his/her knowledge but share it.’</p> <p>‘A wise person will not belittle anyone.’</p> <p>‘Wise people listen, consider other people’s feelings, picture what other people are thinking.’</p>	<p>‘A wise person would reflect on his/her actions and will not be rash.’</p> <p>‘A wise person has logic.’</p> <p>‘A wise person speaks when necessary.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is learning from your mistakes. Wisdom is balance between one’s knowledge, emotions and spirituality.’</p> <p>‘A wise person reflects on concepts. A wise person has the ability to make decisions and find the deeper meaning in things.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom helps you to enjoy life more, because you can always think about life and what is happening around you.’</p>	<p>‘A wise person has an open mind.’</p> <p>‘A wise person investigates and makes new discoveries.’</p>

## Appendix Two: Acquisition of Wisdom in Theory and Practice - Tables 1 & 2

**Table 1: Acquisition of Wisdom in Theory – Wisdom is acquired by ...**

	<b>Stimulus of the innate wisdom</b>	<b>Learning through exploration</b>	<b>Reflection on experience</b>	<b>Spiritual impulse</b>
<b>Founder</b>	<p>‘...it is so critical that virtues and qualities be taught and they must be rooted to their divine source.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom does not happen to adults at a certain age, I think wisdom begins when the child is in the womb.’</p>	<p>‘One is guided reflection...another method...is that philosophy for children...where you have children discussing the meaning of things and understand things and processing their own development of logic with some guiding facility. Another method which has proven very successful is world dilemma discussion...another way is giving people a role of service...’</p>		<p>‘The first and the most important relationship to make us genuine is the relationship of the Creator.’</p> <p>‘It is realising of those values and beliefs in action that confirms one’s commitment and helps one want to value what it is they believe...’</p> <p>‘If we understand the spiritual principle is the greatest source of wisdom, to me it would mean that the study of the sacred writings...increases our thirst for spirituality and helps us deepen our understanding of the physical and intellectual and psychological world with the spiritual principles that guide them.’</p>
<b>Principal and vice-principal</b>		<p>‘...how as a child wisdom was acquired came from watching my parents and listening to my parents...it was always understood in the family that God was everywhere and existed in all things and that we are responsible to behave in a way that God would expect us to be.’</p>		

<p><b>Staff</b></p>	<p>‘Most children already have a great deal of wisdom, and as adults we just need to take the time to see it and to listen...’</p> <p>‘Sometimes we think that when people are naïve, that means that they are not intelligent, that they are ignorant, and that they are incapable of wisdom...I think that many times they [children] are closer to the truth...’</p> <p>‘Can you imagine that each child is a seed? You can’t tell that seed to grow all at once, you can’t yell at it, and you can’t say you must be red and you must smell like this. But the best thing for a seed to grow is to give it lots of sunlight and soil and warmth.’</p>	<p>‘We can gain wisdom through ‘asking questions of ourselves, of our peers and also of our mentors.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom can be gained through the <i>Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh</i>.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is acquired through meditation, through prayer, through regular readings of the Holy Scriptures, through applying the teachings in your life, by making those choices that we make every day.’</p> <p>‘...parents have most of the role.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom has to come from knowledge and the knowledge has to come from the educator, from learning...’</p> <p>‘I think it is the company they keep, their upbringing and environment.’</p> <p>‘I think setting very clear parameters with younger children. I need to give children the power to make choices from very early but structured choices.’</p>	<p>‘Having knowledge in life means having experiences that give you wisdom.’</p> <p>‘Being here on earth is an experience in itself and that is wisdom.’</p> <p>‘Through experience but through the conscious application of lessons learnt...’</p> <p>‘...we have to allow them an opportunity to be wrong in a safe environment...when we go through school we have to give opportunities to make choices...’</p> <p>‘...we can only provide this nest for them, this nurturing environment that will allow them to feel safe enough to make this discovery for themselves.’</p> <p>‘You have to really watch carefully through observation and by experience...’</p>	<p>‘Ultimately I think wisdom comes back to the Source. And it’s ultimately about knowing who we are...and what we are here to do ad accomplish with our lives.’</p> <p>‘Wisdom - they probably acquire it through trial and error, through observation, through speech, through their senses and also using more spiritual senses and then putting all this together and understanding how to make choices.’</p>
<p><b>Students</b></p>	<p>‘Children are born with knowing what adults might not know about the truth of certain things.’</p> <p>‘I think everyone is wise, you just need to learn how to release it.’</p> <p>‘If I put wisdom as a child, then it is tenderness and love and caring and being there for people.’</p> <p>Children acquire wisdom ‘right from the start, when they are born...they are gaining wisdom from hearing other people talk, seeing what they do...they learn by their parents, brothers and sisters, how they see them interact.’</p> <p>‘I have met lots of youth that are very, very</p>	<p>Wisdom can be acquired from people who are wise themselves like native elders.</p> <p>‘Wisdom is having knowledge and like having a conscience more...’</p> <p>‘Wisdom is about learning and sharing and feeling.’</p> <p>‘...through finding out through their own speech, through actions...reflecting on what you do in the day, what you could do to improve or change it by reading, researching in your own time.’</p>	<p>‘Wisdom is something that you don’t acquire, like you could acquire it through experience, but you can’t learn it out of a book.’</p> <p>‘Sometimes you’ll have little, and then you can get more as you experience things and comprehend them after they’ve gone by.’</p> <p>‘One acquires wisdom through time with experience’.</p> <p>‘...part of it has been from me learning from my own mistakes and really reflecting on those mistakes and deciding how I am going...to change or how I am going to approach the</p>	<p>‘Wisdom of the native elders has been brought to them by the Creator’.</p> <p>‘One of the main components, I think would be help from the spiritual realm, help from God.’</p> <p>‘...I think wisdom is just something that a lot of people...they take it for granted and then when they lose it...they don’t have the right amount.’</p> <p>‘When I really reflect on the writings and I try and work that into my life...’</p> <p>‘...reading the writings of the Faith, even by doing that you acquire a lot of wisdom...’</p>



	<p>endowed with wisdom.’</p> <p>‘I think that my wisdom was acquired through my parents, but it is embedded in you from a young age.’</p>		<p>situation differently the next time.’</p> <p>‘I do believe that wisdom comes from experience...’</p> <p>‘I think it is both by experience and by it being taught to you by people who have experienced it who try to convey it to you.’</p> <p>‘Just by doing, by trial and error, I don’t think you can figure out the mathematics of it. It is just something you get by trying things...’</p>	<p>‘...something good that they can acquire wisdom from is that they can acquire it from other people who have a lot of wisdom, like native elders who have acquired a lot of wisdom through the things they have gone through and learnt and the wisdom that the Creator brought to them.’</p>
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**Table 2: Acquisition of Wisdom in Practice, as Facilitated by NCCI**

**How does NCCI facilitate wisdom?**

DATA	DERIVED CONCEPTS
<p><b>Staff</b></p> <p>'Schools need both academic as well as moral teachings for a true education and at NCCI these are twin pillars. We talk about academic excellence and a clear moral framework and that both are required...in the writings [Bahá'í] it often says that it's more important even to talk about – to have moral teachings, to be someone who is a moral person and maybe not educated academically, is better than being someone who's very strong academically but not a moral person.'</p> <p>'Parents innately realise and appreciate the moral teachings.'</p> <p>'It is important to have the balance between the academics and the moral teachings.'</p> <p><i>How does the communication director apply the moral capabilities in his work?</i></p> <p>By 'loving where I am, loving the people that I work with...'</p> <p>'By creating an environment that is beautiful.'</p> <p>'By investigating, researching other like minded organisations to learn form them.'</p> <p>'By reading the writings daily.'</p> <p>'By striving "to be truly honest about what we are". We mention that Gordon Naylor is a Bahá'í, but we respect people from all Faith backgrounds and appreciate differences...'</p> <p>'We talk about the importance of spirituality at the outset.'</p> <p>The information package 'was the most challenging piece I've ever put together...'</p> <p>'We went through a consultative process and there was so much input from so many different people...the piece ended up being far stronger because of that consultative process, but a lot more time-consuming, a lot more changes, a lot more work was done on it. But ultimately I saw it as a positive experience.'</p> <p><i>Q: Contributing to the establishment of justice [one of the MC]. Please explain.</i></p> <p>'...an environment where they learn about world issues and how these world issues apply to them and how they can personally make a difference in the world that they live in, we believe we are raising up young people to become leaders and to make a contribution to the world around them and these young</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCCI operates on twin pillars of academic excellence and a clear moral framework.</li> <li>• Morality has precedence over academic achievement.</li> <li>• The moral framework is based on the <i>19 Moral Capabilities</i> which are in line with the United Nations human rights code.</li> <li>• The school is open to 'all Faiths and all backgrounds'.</li> <li>• Teachers are trained on moral capabilities and moral framework is implemented in the classrooms.</li> <li>• Staff train on moral capabilities and principles of education for one week prior to the commencement of school.</li> <li>• Staff attend regular staff meetings to assess how they are applying the moral capabilities in their classrooms.</li> <li>• Staff act as role models for students in carrying out the moral capabilities.</li> <li>• The concept of consultation is regularly used in carrying out the activities of NCCI.</li> <li>• NCCI creates an environment where students learn about world issues. The students are encouraged to make a difference in the world, to become leaders who contribute to the process of justice.</li> <li>• Staff consult regularly and are willing to move forward and believe in what they are doing.</li> <li>• There is a spirit of teamwork among the staff.</li> <li>• Students who attend NCCI are from all over the world: Asia, Africa, Europe, south America, China, Japan, Guyana, Kuwait, Korea, Ethiopia to name some.</li> </ul>

<p>people will ultimately contribute to you know the justice process.’</p> <p>CONSULTATION</p> <p>‘...through consultation with staff members, the administrative team consults, there’s a corporate board that consults, teachers and staff members consult regularly...’</p> <p>‘...I have never worked in an environment where things change so quickly. It is because of the consultative process and our willingness to move forward.’</p> <p>‘Major renovations at the beginning of the year was [sic] done by volunteers which included many staff of NCCI.’</p>	
<p>‘...from just observing the students, they all seem very close knit, very friendly to each other...you don’t see older kids picking on younger kids or any of that, they all seem very friendly at any age level, there doesn’t seem to be a class system or anything.’</p> <p>‘...all the kids treating each other equally...doesn’t matter how smart you are, we are all in the same boat, and we are all here to help each other out, and I think that is a good cornerstone to start learning and obtaining wisdom.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are close and friendly to each other. There is absence of a class system in the school.</li> <li>• Students treat each other equally, which is a good foundation to start obtaining wisdom.</li> </ul>
<p>‘They have diversity in school and they promote it, and they promote moral standards, and they promote equality of people all across the board, men and women.’</p> <p><i>How do you help children gain wisdom, in the dorm?</i></p> <p>‘Just by example, my own example. I think by being patient, tolerant, more sharing.’</p> <p>‘I think that it is real important in a classroom setting for a teacher to be really, really positive and acknowledge all the steps that children take towards wisdom, and even point out the steps that lead towards wisdom. For instance, I may acknowledge a student who has done a research paper in any subject, and say you’ve really gained a lot of knowledge about this area, and now you’re in a better position to analyse say art, because you have this knowledge, and I might also bring up an experience that students have had in class, or that they’ve had through a character in literature or drama, and I might say, “if you were this character and had this knowledge, what other route would this character have taken, by the end, by playing the moral character of this character and playing things this way?”’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the promotion of diversity.</li> <li>• Through the promotion of moral standards.</li> <li>• Through the promotion of the concept of Oneness of Humanity.</li> <li>• Through the promotion of the concept of equality of men and women.</li> <li>• Through the role modeling of staff.</li> <li>• Through the supportive and encouraging class environment created by the teachers who lead students to gain knowledge, analyse the knowledge, learn from peers and think for themselves, always drawing their attention to the <i>Moral Capabilities</i>.</li> <li>• Through giving confidence to students to believe in their own strength to question and analyse and come up with solutions.</li> <li>• Through the belief system of teachers who believe that they are creating a generation of wise children who are interested in increasing their wisdom.</li> <li>• Through workshop which takes the students through several levels of understanding from performance to education and individual and community transformation.</li> <li>• Through the Fall Showcase and the Spring Festival, which teaches students through performance the concept of how Unity in Diversity feels like and looks like.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through creating a safe environment for the students and staff.</li> <li>• Encouraging students' creativity and imagination to perform in front of the whole school at the Festivals or the morning assemblies, abiding by the guidelines given to them.</li> <li>• By developing the school culture of richness and diversity through acceptance.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Can you give a concrete example of applying the Moral Capabilities to a character?</i></p> <p>'Valuing one's strengths and weakness, evaluating one's ego as applied to the character Hamlet, one could say that Hamlet is incapable of assessing his own strengths and weakness, without involving his ego, he wouldn't be so immersed in his own emotions, he is very egotistical, and he is very focused about how he feels about it all and he can't...his is not developed enough in those two areas to take a real look at his actual situation, what he can do. So that might be a real good discussion, I would never really give that student, I would let them decide, I wouldn't even decide what they had to get to, I would just ask them to apply moral capabilities to Hamlet and assess which ones need a little bit more work. They will come with many more than I could think of. And even though I might have ones that I want to tell them, I won't, because I believe that is their route to wisdom. If they hear what I think,, then they think I am smart. That does not help them really. They need to realise that they can figure these things out, and come with things that they'd never even thought about before, and therefore they know that they're smart or they're wise for being able to come up with these things. And if they don't know that, I'll tell them that.'</p> <p>'That is what we're creating here, I believe. A generation of wise children, and people who are interested in increasing their wisdom.'</p> <p>'...certainly "workshop" is another area where wisdom is developed. Usually go through a series of love and understanding. At first they think they are performing for people, and then they think they are educating people, and then they realise that they are changing their own lives and developing wisdom about things they thought they knew about, but now they're starting to know about and they're making this kind of realisation to other people.'</p> <p>'Every year we have two festivals, the Fall Showcase and the Spring Festival. Students are allowed to perform independently or in groups or representing either drama or dance workshop or are in a band. I guess they go through a number of ways of understanding this sort of performance too. They first think about what they're going to do and how well they're going to perform, whether it's individually or in a group. Then they start to understand they are part of a larger group, a diverse group. They may be performing either song or dance. Everybody is doing kind of the same thing but nobody is doing exactly the same thing, and the richness and diversity of the group is really exciting. And they move to really deep appreciation of what other people are doing. And certainly by the end, by the time we're ready to perform it, they are feeling a bond, with all of the other people who are performing, they really come to</p>	

<p>an understanding of what Unity in Diversity is and how it moves in this school, and how it really should be in the world. They usually have some ideas about competition and how destructive it really is and how prevalent it is in the performing arts, and how it can destroy an appreciation of other people's gifts.'</p> <p>'We create a safe environment for students and staff to be comfortable with who they are...by giving guidelines for say an activity and by letting students know that we welcome creativity and imagination, and then allowing groups to present things in front of the whole school at assembly. It is very important for the group that is presenting, but also for the group that is seeing, because when it comes to their turn to present, they are going to be able to present something that is very creative, very imaginative and that it will be welcomed, it will be accepted. And the more that happens, the more the culture here is developed. People just know that they can be themselves here.'</p>	
<p>NCCI facilitates wisdom 'in a way that allows the youth to be themselves, and gives them the opportunity to explore. I mean they're given the tools, the teachers here, and staff, they give the guidance and the support to all the students, and by doing so it allows them to think for themselves. When they're here at this school, they're given the opportunity to think for themselves, to take in the information and mull around and digest it how they want. NCCI is a very good environment for creating wisdom. People obtain wisdom, they're given every opportunity to expand, to go further, not just to accept that this is what it is and that all there is.'</p> <p>'I think that one of the really strong aspects that they're given for this would be the workshop, and not just the dance workshop...she runs a program, a lot of times for drama students, she teaches them their tools, the things they need to know, and then they're taken out into the community. And when they get out into the community, I think they're really given the opportunity to see how those skills work, then they have the opportunity not only to use them, but also to have feedback at the same time and then they return. They go out into the elementary school, they work with younger children...'</p> <p>'By implementing moral capabilities...and throughout the school year, the moral capabilities are constantly being reviewed, and in every opportunity that we can we implement one or more of the capabilities and we make sure that the students are aware that that is what they are practising, not just in the classroom...I think that it is really a very strong part of the foundation at NCCI.'</p> <p>'...mentoring is certainly one of those areas where not only do we review moral capabilities, but we do much more than that. It allows us to really develop a one-on-one relationship with students. I have a group of six, but it allows you to give them, again support and an environment where they can feel safe, where they can explore life in all its various aspects, so it is my job to be there to help them with that, to answer their questions, to provide guidance to find answers if I don't have them.'</p> <p>'So it is very interesting when they come to me about a job that is not about band-aids, that I help them to think things out, to ask a question and I'll help by saying, 'so what do you think you could do?', 'what do you think you should have done?', so again it comes back to getting them to think about the issue,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the supportive environment created by the staff who allow the youth to be themselves, to think for themselves and to have every opportunity to expand.</li> <li>• Through teaching students the attitude and skills needed during dance and drama workshops and facilitating their implementation through performance and service projects within the community.</li> <li>• Through practising and incorporation of the <i>Moral Capabilities</i> within the curriculum in classes and in the school environment, and drawing the students' attention to what they are practising.</li> <li>• Through the mentoring systems where moral capabilities are reviewed and a sound relationship is built between the staff and the students. Through mentoring which allows students to explore various aspects of life, gives answer to their questions and provides guidance.</li> <li>• Through giving the students the choice to be at the school through an interview process.</li> </ul>

<p>and what are the steps they can take to resolve it.’</p> <p>‘Every student here goes through an interview process, part of the criteria of being at NCCI is that you choose to be here, you’re not here because somebody says you have to be here...’</p>	
<p>‘We have discovered in the teaching process of drama...that if the student does not discover it themselves, it is almost like they don’t have an ownership of it. In the performing arts, it is very hard to tell people what to do, you cannot tell them , you can only provide an environment and materials to help them discover it for themselves.’</p> <p>‘I think there is closeness here between the staff and the students. The family environment has a lot to do with wisdom, because I don’t think people can really learn unless they feel safe, they must take risks too, but they must feel like their mistakes are not held against them. I think that risk is an element of acquiring wisdom, we have to go to a place where we can say, “I don’t know how this works, and I can ask questions and I can feel safe to do that”, and being in a family environment really allows you to do that, to grow in that way, and to be humble in the face of learning and to feel safe to say “no I don’t know this, I am happy to learn that.” Not just about academic things, but about the world around you, and the people you interact with.’</p> <p>‘I think there are two levels to that. First is that there is a high level of discipline to that. We look at discipline the wrong way, we think that it is about making people do certain things, being strict in punishing. But I think when you have a highly disciplined environment, you set high standards, students feel supported by that. They feel safe, because they know that if someone breaks the rules, there are consequences to that. And it shows that the people they work with really care. And then there is also the general connection of the students that happens in mentorship. Mentorship is such an important time, I spend so much time with my assigned mentors and that I kind of adopted throughout the years who are students that just come to talk to me and the little things like the fact that we eat lunch with them. And it seems like such a little thing, but I have had so many wonderful conversations when I have sat down with students and had lunch with them and said, “how do you really feel?” It does not have to be a big in-depth conversation, but just the thing that they know they can talk with us, and they can come to see us, and we spend lots and lots of time with them. The teachers here, all of the staff seem to genuinely care about what we are doing, and generally care about the well-being of each of the students. And the first priority here seems to be not in the reputation of the school or the power or success of the teachers. And those kinds of things create a nice environment. And the small size too, there is only a hundred students, I mean I can’t imagine being in a classroom where I have 35 students, I mean I love being able to work with a class and being able to go back and say can we look at this or even if there is a language difficulty I can take the time to explain those sort of things and I feel that I don’t lose anyone. In a really big school people can get lost. I don’t think I have a class where I can’t be in touch with each of my students on a daily basis.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through providing a safe, nurturing environment with a moral framework and information where students can investigate and discover things for themselves. Students can travel and interact and talk about different social issues and have a chance to implement what they have learnt.</li> <li>• Through creating a safe family environment where the humble posture of learning allows students to feel free to take risks, to ask questions about any issue and their mistakes are not held against them.</li> <li>• Through creating a high level of discipline by setting high standards where students are accountable for their actions and the mentorship system where students are truly connected with the staff and feel safe to share their concerns and achievements.</li> <li>• Through one of the methods of mentorship where staff and students eat lunch together, and students feel the genuine care of staff towards them and they have contact on a daily basis.</li> <li>• Through the small size of classes where each student’s needs are attended to.</li> </ul>

<p>‘What really makes a difference here is that kids are free to talk, they give their opinion...when we practice the <i>19 MC</i>, or when we have workshops for the teachers and the staff one of the things that staff are encouraged to do is that when they make a mistake they admit it to their students.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through mentorship, <i>Moral Capabilities</i> where students are free and encouraged to give their opinion.</li> <li>• Through workshop training for staff – where among many things staff are encouraged to admit their mistakes.</li> </ul>
<p>‘From my understanding it does a really good job. All the individuals that are involved in this school are committed to it. They care about students and NCCI also has certain guidelines how an environment should be created, the kind of environment that facilitates learning and it has its focus on the arts and creativity, which is necessary for discovery and learning about the world through your own eyes rather than some popular social cultural norm. I think by doing that they will be able to acquire their own wisdom, rather than learning a set code or behaviour. I think students really understand what they do when they come out of NCCI about their choice.’</p> <p><i>In your role as a dorm parent, how do you facilitate wisdom?</i></p> <p>‘Well as a Bahá’í there is always the spiritual component, introducing the idea of having prayers on a daily basis, and having talks and discussions where youth can talk about or have a speaker come in and talk about issues that are important for their development at the time... Also because of the fact that a live-in situation where you have so many people living together, there is a lot of social interaction and combined with spiritual education and knowledge and all of these things, I think it really allows them to develop their own sense of how to go about doing things. And also getting to know them, and what is important to each one of them so I can help them, if they ask questions, I can give them my opinion about things and we can be open about consultation.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the firm commitment of the staff to their duties.</li> <li>• Through staff care and provision of guidelines for an environment which facilitates learning through arts and creativity.</li> <li>• Through understanding that arts and creativity are necessary for discovery and learning about the world through one’s own eyes rather than some popular social cultural norm.</li> <li>• Through conducting regular prayer sessions in the dormitories, organising guest speakers or having consultation sessions about issues which are important for the development of the students, through establishing a close relationship between the dorm parents and the students, through having to live in a place where so many people from different backgrounds live.</li> </ul>
<p>‘The students come to you and give you a hug and they are all very loving. It is like a family, they are all very close. That is a good thing. They are all into their studies, which is good.’</p> <p><i>The students are interviewed before they come into the school. What do you think of that?</i></p> <p>‘I think it shows that we care about them at the school. We are not going to tolerate anything, because you don’t want one person coming in and messing up the school...I have also heard that Mr. Naylor is very strict on drugs. It is just not tolerated. It think it is great.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through a family-like environment at the school which is loving.</li> <li>• Through not tolerating at all drugs and alcohol.</li> </ul>
<p>‘I think it is one of their <i>Moral Capabilities</i> and most of the students, particularly the ones that have been here a while, know most or all of those <i>MCs</i>. And they are given many opportunities to apply them. The greatest difficulty is that the vision of the school is the best that I have ever seen of any school, I like to work here. The difficulty here is that there is so much individual variance between teachers. Some of the teachers are just brilliant, and others, they are really not teachers, there is a talent and not everyone can</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through giving students the opportunities to apply the moral capabilities.</li> <li>• Through a well defined vision of the school.</li> <li>• Through the workshop dances which makes the issues real to them.</li> </ul>

have that station. There is a vision that NCCI has that is well defined. I think in time all the teachers can become teachers. I think they are all wonderful teachers, there is great variance in capacities. Hopefully, as these students go through the school, they will become better teachers.'

'They did some dances on abuse, equality, and unity. It seems very ethereal, the rehearsal. And then when they go to a prison or a high school to perform, places where these issues are dealt with on a daily basis, it provokes a response from the patrons, and they ask questions, and it evokes a fresh response that is exactly what you want. They are forced to talk about it, how is it different for them, how do they apply it to their own school, so it becomes very real for them. And they are youth so they like to deal with it in a non-intellectual way, so it goes a bit deeper, doesn't have to be artistic, it is just not intellectual, so they never find it boring.'

'Over the fall we are going to have 15 to 20 performances just over 3 months'.

*How many people are involved in the workshop?*

'Last year they had two casts of 15 run over the whole year...the name is going to change from workshop to Art Theatre because it is dance, drama and...'



DATA	DERIVED CONCEPTS
<p><b>Students</b></p> <p>'NCCI isn't just an ordinary school. I think there's plenty of opportunities for different things. There's also spiritual devotion and learning more about other religions.'</p> <p>'NCCI focuses on "students" individual needs, their need to express their spiritualism to other and younger students, or older students.'</p> <p>Students 'can work on what they have and what they've learned to study knowledge more deeply and find other means for discovering solutions to problems, not just in school work but in social life.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spiritual devotion and learning about other religions.</li> <li>• Creating an environment for students to share their faith and belief system.</li> <li>• Low number of students in class, approx. 12. More attention by teachers to students in the class.</li> <li>• Creating an environment where students can think and reflect.</li> </ul>
<p>CONCRETE EXAMPLE AT NCCI – GEOGRAPHY CLASS</p> <p><i>In my geography class the other day we did a study on a moral dilemma kind of an activity...this class is more about a lot of world issues and one that a lot of students have reflected on and has been a big controversy was sweat shops in Third World countries. And it's about a woman who wanted to go work for a company except – she wanted to go help build the technology at one of these factories that was basically considered, you know, people working 12 hours a day for very low income and we had to decide: if we were her what decision would we make? And there were a lot of issues that came up and I think afterwards, after hearing everybody's point of view and having a consultation on it, that one way that I acquired some wisdom because I formed – I don't know, like everybody shared ideas and that, that really helped me to see all the points of view.</i></p> <p><i>Q – Consultation happens everywhere, what is different at NCCI?</i></p> <p>'In any other school that I've been to, when we have a debate in class we debate and the teacher always says, "now I want you to be open minded. Don't call anybody stupid. Listen to the person that's talking". But I've found that a lot of the time people weren't listening, they were just waiting, you know, to shout something – shout their opinion, and it was – it did become really a debate. It became people arguing and – I remember I took a Law class and people would get so frustrated and so mad and at the end of a class they'd want to punch a wall in, basically. And here it was – the teacher basically said, "you talk, then you point to somebody and then they're allowed to talk and nobody talks out of turn, and then in that way it became – and then we split up into groups and we consulted about it and in that way like it was a really quiet atmosphere and basically it didn't give anybody reason to really, you know, get up and shout and jump like that and I think that's an important example of how they go about doing it.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through moral dilemma discussions.</li> <li>• NCCI teachers maintain a respectful and peaceful environment in the class.</li> </ul>

<p>'It really depends on the school [to facilitate wisdom]. I know I've been at three schools so far...the problem was that the teachers didn't think the kids wanted to learn and they weren't going to try and make us and the students wouldn't learn...[at another school] my friend telling a story about how some kid started punching him in the school yard. They got into a fight and one teacher just stood there watching, they didn't do a thing because they weren't going to try to separate these kids. They were just like, "This is their problem, leave them alone..."</p> <p>'The teachers, the kids and the learning programme all have to fit together. And if one of them's not working then nothing's going to work.'</p> <p>'It's just no one's – despite what difference you have in religion it's all one, it's considered one here so really no one's better than the other.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCCI teachers maintain a peaceful environment within the school through real care for children and their development.</li> <li>• NCCI facilitates wisdom through long periods so the students have time to reflect on the issues discussed in the class.</li> <li>• Being a Bahá'í at NCCI does not make one better than others.</li> </ul>
<p>NCCI facilitates wisdom 'through the basics of the foundations of the school which is moral, the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, and <i>Moral Capabilities</i>. And also I think that mentoring is another good way of doing that.'</p> <p>'Because that is what the school is founded on, it is the written thing from God to help us acquire wisdom. Well in some way you could acquire wisdom through reading the writings and learning things and applying them, and you could learn from that experience. So I think the principles of the Bahá'í Faith help hold the body of the school.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCCI facilitates wisdom through the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, the <i>Moral Capabilities</i> and mentoring.</li> <li>• Through reading the Bahá'í writings and applying them in one's life.</li> <li>• God intends all to acquire wisdom.</li> <li>• Through friendships and devotions.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wisdom is taught through experiments in classes [wisdom=practical knowledge].</li> </ul>
<p>'Here you focus on the moral character, you have guidelines to do that, it is sort of like a parenting school...they [teachers] are like our parents for a while, like in classes we have many moral things that the teachers bring to us...we get to assembly each morning, spiritual process, all the components.'</p> <p>'There's workshop, it facilitates a lot of growth in people. You should see the difference, when people first come to workshop, and when they leave. And everyone says that when you go to NCCI you change so much...'</p> <p>'...like in other schools, it was more of, "Hi, call me, lets go out for coffee". Here there is discussion on the Bahá'í Faith, we have discussions on everything.'</p> <p>Student council = 'it is not one of those where everyone campaigns. We do it by secret ballot.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through focus on moral character building through the guidelines provided.</li> <li>• Through teachers who act like parents.</li> <li>• Through morning assemblies with devotion.</li> <li>• Through workshops.</li> <li>• Through discussions on various matters.</li> <li>• Through a different system of voting for the student council.</li> </ul>

<p>'There is also a Bahá'í youth council and other committees that people are on. But that is usually nothing to do with NCCI.'</p>	
<p>'In some of the classes, like social sciences, we are challenged to think up situations for geography, for example, what would be a problem in some country, and then find solutions to give feedback, make a plan and see if it works. Doing that kind of thing makes you understand what things would work, and even your sense of the world, it makes you more aware of things.'</p> <p>'...the NCCI workshop, which focuses on bringing public awareness to schools, elementary and retired home's people. They go into the community and dance or talk about some of these issues, and make people know, and possibly give solutions.'</p> <p>'Two main dance workshops...there is practices on issues and deepening twice a week...these projects are the "world citizenship" projects'.</p> <p>'I know that our curriculum is based on a high academic excellence and a moral framework and having those two together form quite a strong framework for bringing up wise people.'</p> <p>'They are incorporated into every class, even Math class. For example, to create a sense of duty, and an example of that is making your notes and doing whatever in your class. There are many other moral capabilities, like evaluating yourself without involving your ego...'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through discussions and making of plans about hypothetical issues in classes such as social sciences and geography which enhance the students' understandings of the world's challenges and solutions.</li> <li>• Through NCCI dance workshops which focus on bringing public awareness to schools and community.</li> <li>• Through the curriculum which is based on a high academic excellence and a moral framework.</li> <li>• Through moral capabilities which are incorporated in every class.</li> </ul>
<p>'I think that the closer relationship with a teacher helps you, we have some very wise teachers here, it think being in close contact with them is one of the great ways of acquiring wisdom...and sharing. There is a much closer social atmosphere with your peers. I think if you learn from other people's experiences, not just your own, that can help you acquire wisdom.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close relationships of teachers with students.</li> <li>• Close social atmosphere with peers so they can learn from each other's experiences.</li> <li>• Social dilemmas and moral dilemmas.</li> <li>• Feedback from the audience during the workshop tours.</li> </ul>
<p>'I think that NCCI here, since you can't put people down because of the clothes that they wear because you are all in uniform, which is very good. And that teaches you not to put people down because that detracts from the acquiring of wisdom.'</p> <p>'...it talks about unity a lot here and that creates an open mind, and it is very cultural...for instance if your are talking about religion and you are stuck with one culture, you would be hopeless.'</p> <p>'If I had any problems or anything I would feel comfortable going up to them and talking to them.'</p> <p>'...responsibility management and there it is very nice, cos if you did have a problem, they would talk to you and say what do you want to do to change this, because it is going to get you in a lot of trouble...you</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The wearing of uniform is conducive to wisdom.</li> <li>• The theme of unity creates an open mind.</li> <li>• Workshop, mentorship, close relationship with teachers.</li> <li>• Through discipline committee, now called responsibility management committee.</li> </ul>

<p>will find that there are kids here that have been on drugs and everything. In one year, they stop drugs, stop swearing, stop everything.’</p>	
<p>‘That is the whole idea of NCCI, is about bringing wisdom to young people and showing them the <i>Moral Capabilities</i>. So it is showing them what they can have and what they need to have to do right things in the world, when they get out on their own.’</p> <p>‘The relationship between the staff and the students is amazing. They always seem to try their hardest to help the children with whatever problems they have to do.’</p> <p>‘...world citizenship curriculum....capability build Unity in Diversity’.</p> <p>‘Workshop is an amazing experience...it sort of brings an awareness, when you start workshop, you are not sure what you are getting into, but it establishes an awareness in you, when you start doing these dances, you realise all these issues and all the problems that society has...’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moral Capabilities</i> show what attitude and skills students need to have to do right things in the world.</li> <li>• The sincere, warm relationship between staff and students.</li> <li>• World citizenship classes.</li> <li>• Workshop.</li> </ul>
<p>NCCI facilitates wisdom through ‘mainly the Bahá’í religion, it is the way they go about doing things...they’ve got the capabilities.’</p> <p><i>Are you a Bahá’í?</i></p> <p>‘No I am not.’</p> <p><i>Okay.</i></p> <p>‘But they help me to be a better person. To know right from wrong, you know they teach you things that you need to know, and that will help you be wise I guess, the capabilities.’</p> <p>‘Every morning we have devotions, and when you read it and you think of it, you get into it, you learn a lot, from all these really great people who have said something and you learn it and you take it to heart and that helps. That is something I really like here in this school.’</p> <p>‘Teachers in class, they go about in a way that makes you feel really good. They are here for us...’</p> <p><i>How do you understand that, that the teachers are there for you?</i></p> <p>Well like at other schools, you have got, emm, you can tell they care here, like at other schools, you hear the teachers say, “oh man, they don’t pay me enough here, I want this, I want that, this isn’t good”, but here you know, we’ve got mentoring. I’ve never been to a school where they actually give you that. Usually you go up to the counselor, but they’ve got set aside time, for you to talk to them, they’ve got a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the use of <i>Moral Capabilities</i> and the principles of the Bahá’í Faith.</li> <li>• Through systematic morning devotions at assembly and reflection on those.</li> <li>• Through an atmosphere of sincere love and care created by the teachers for the students.</li> <li>• Through the teachers’ enhanced understanding and humility in carrying out their tasks</li> <li>• Through the teachers’ genuine spirit of service to the students.</li> <li>• Through the system of mentoring.</li> <li>• Through the system of study hall.</li> <li>• Through the availability of the counselor of the school.</li> <li>• Through living with international students.</li> <li>• Through the theme of Unity in Diversity where all cultures and religions are accepted.</li> </ul>

<p>study hall, which you know, it is not a punishment, but to help you along. They got all these little things there to help. What they say to you sometimes, they are here to learn from us, we're here to learn from them. You just, you get what they're saying, it is like they really want to teach you and they are happy with what they're doing, not for the money only.'</p> <p>'You can call yourself "internash"...it is a good thing to know about so much else and to accept all the other religions, and cultures.'</p>	
<p>'In this school everybody is one group and they are like friends, and everybody helps others, and the teachers all help. They are not here for the money. Half of this school is Bahá'í people, so they are like helping people so they are helping the Cause by teaching children or youth.'</p> <p>'I think it is really important to involve ourselves in something other than school. So the project that of doing service hours, is really, really a good idea, cos it gives people a chance to serve the world, because you know, we don't have to be brilliant, because that is really teaching us to change our personality, to be a better person.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The atmosphere of the school does not encourage 'clicks'.</li> <li>• Bahá'í staff see it as their duty and privilege to be in the teaching field.</li> <li>• Through required service hours which contributes to the society at large and teaches individuals to become better human beings.</li> </ul>
<p>'This school is more like, they work with you. It is interactive. Not like other schools.'</p> <p>'If they are teaching a class, they won't make it boring, there will be ups and downs, and then there are mediums. It won't be just all the same, it will be all over the place, so there is little bit of strict work, a little bit of fun, a little bit of activity.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the interactive atmosphere of the school.</li> <li>• Through making the classes interesting and joyful.</li> </ul>
<p>'You are more likely to further yourself in your quest to gain wisdom by going through a good school, because if there are many people around you who are wise, because I find that many of the teachers at NCCI are very knowledgeable and wise people who've gained wisdom through experience, and when people like that are around you, you are more likely to gain wisdom, to become like them.'</p> <p>'I don't know that we have any specific example, it is more of an atmosphere and I think that is something essential. I think that when adults are supportive, I think that many of the teachers at NCCI have experienced a lot of things.'</p> <p>Teachers 'have confidence in their own strengths...by giving us experiences, they are contributing to our wisdom.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through staff who are knowledgeable and wise themselves.</li> <li>• Through the school environment created by the staff who are supportive.</li> <li>• Through teachers who have confidence in their own strengths.</li> <li>• Through facilitating for the students the process of experience building.</li> </ul>
<p>'They give us opportunities to help the community. They help us to be good students. They help us when we are upset or sad or need something and they teach us how to be good people. They also teach us how to be nice to one another...she [the principal] is setting good examples.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the service component where students are encouraged to serve the community.</li> <li>• Through attending to the physical and emotional needs of the students.</li> <li>• Through teaching social skills to the students as to how they should relate with one another.</li> <li>• Through setting good examples by the staff.</li> </ul>

<p>'It does in some way facilitate wisdom because it is a school for academic excellence. So it has a very high standard and is an encouraging environment. The teachers are always helpful. They want to let you learn and they will even stay back to try and help you.'</p> <p>'It is a very spiritual school. They say prayers in the morning and that is helpful for lots of people because some people are very religious. It is not like biased, it is open to all religions. So if you are Muslim you don't feel like, "I cannot say my prayers here, I am not wanted".'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the very high standard set by the school of academic excellence.</li> <li>• Through its encouraging environment.</li> <li>• Through the help of the staff who go out of their way to help students learn.</li> <li>• Through morning assembly multi-faith prayers which is welcoming to students of different religious backgrounds.</li> </ul>
<p>'Especially as a boarding school, you learn a lot about how to live with other people...there is always learning the <i>Moral Capabilities</i> and there are classes, specific classes that are offered only in NCCI that deal with morality and social issues. So because you ARE sheltered from the everyday aspects of these problems, you can try and seek a solution. Also just the fact that there are so many students from different cultures, you must find something that unites you, you can't really be united on popular music and popular culture, because you are from different places and you have to be able to talk on a completely different level.'</p> <p>'It is a mandatory class, world citizenship curriculum (WCC) and when I took it, they incorporated the dance workshop. So we talked about racism, drugs, things like that and we learnt about these issues and what the Bahá'í writings say about these issues.'</p> <p>'They have the mentorship program, and that enables you to talk to someone about different aspects of your life and they can guide you on things that you wouldn't talk about in your classes. Like when you go to mentorship they ask you how you're doing, spiritually, emotionally. In class, the teacher asks the class about different aspects of their life.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the boarding system which exposes students to other people from many different cultural backgrounds and one has to learn about Unity in Diversity.</li> <li>• Through moral capabilities.</li> <li>• Through the mandatory WCC classes which deal with morality and social issues based on the Bahá'í writings.</li> <li>• Through the dance workshop which teaches about the issues surrounding drugs, alcoholism, equality between sexes and racism.</li> <li>• Through the mentorship program which enables students to be guided by staff and be cared for in their spiritual and emotional growth.</li> </ul>
<p>'For me it has facilitated it, because where I come from, we are in general open minded persons, that we are all human beings, Unity in Diversity. The Bahá'í Faith, it will always say that we are human beings, and we all have the same rights. We are similar, not equal and we can all learn something from each other and in NCCI we learn the fact that there are international students and you get a lot of different views and you actually consider a different perspective.'</p> <p><i>[Comment of someone who does not participate in the workshop about the workshop]</i></p> <p>'I think the workshop, I haven't been to it, but I think it facilitates wisdom. They have to learn the different ways people are and act and show people through these dances, how in their own group they have diversity. They have Chinese, Mexican etc. So they have group, and they are going to teach the people, and learn from people, you teach and you learn.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the concepts of the Bahá'í Faith such as Unity in Diversity, the oneness of humankind and considering various students' different perspectives.</li> <li>• Through the workshop as they learn to work in a multicultural environment and share their skills with the community in a posture of learning.</li> </ul>
<p>'I think it definitely did. I wasn't very open-minded until I came here. I guess every part of the NCCI environment is really good, residents, students...I don't think the curriculum, but more the structure of the school. The teachers are more caring, the classes are smaller size, the workshop...'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the environment and the structure of the school.</li> <li>• Through the attitude of the caring staff towards the students and the smaller class sizes.</li> </ul>

## Appendix Three: Excursus

The excursus is a summary of a separate interview with Mr. Naylor, the founder of the school regarding the *19 Moral Capabilities*. The entire body of staff and students of NCCI maintain that they strive towards achieving the moral standard set by these nineteen character-building principles. The *19 Moral Capabilities* harmonise with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and are perceived as essential to the acquisition of wisdom.

### **How NCCI facilitates wisdom based on the *19 Moral Capabilities***

Mr. Naylor believes that acquiring the *Moral Capabilities* represents a real shift in the individual's mental framework. These *Moral Capabilities* are based on the model of service rather than on the model of power. There are four major elements that make up the *Moral Capabilities*: concepts, attitudes, virtues and skills.

All of the students are asked at the beginning of the year to rewrite the *Moral Capabilities* in what they call 'youth talk'. This means that the youth have to break down the works and express them in a way that would enable any youth to understand their meaning. This exercise helps to make the *Moral Capabilities* real to them. The youths are then put into groups of two or three, and asked to rewrite the *Moral Capabilities* and present them to the large group. The second part of this activity requires the youths to work in small groups, select a moral capability and describe it according to the four categories mentioned above, namely their understanding of the concept of the moral capability, the attitude required to demonstrate that moral capability, and the virtues and skills required for its implementation. The students are expected to discern the virtues and attitudes

necessary to express that specific moral capability, thus helping them to get to the conceptual understanding of that moral capability.

The following section describes in detail how the school facilitates wisdom capability-by-capability.

*First: Evaluating one's own strength and weaknesses without involving ego*

One of the exercises practised to help teach this moral capability involves a communication doll strategy through which the youths become aware of where they have come from, who they are and what skills they have developed. The stick figure's right arm indicates what the individual has done in the past, the left arm indicates the goals the individual wants to achieve in the future, the left leg indicates who the individual has been in terms of himself and his family, and the right leg indicates what the individual thinks he and his family will be in the future.

Another exercise encourages the youths to write three messages they hear in their head that their parents have said about them. This will involve both positive and negative messages, and the facilitator can be creative about this task. The staff also discuss the value and purpose of the *Moral Capabilities*. These means are used to explain to the students the value of being a good team member, and to enable them to take positive and negative feedback and use it to develop further.

The students also become aware of their weaknesses and strengths through the world citizenship classes, where transactional analysis and cognitive therapy are used to enhance their understanding about themselves and how they can become psychologically stronger individuals.



*Second: Transcending one's lower passions by focusing on higher purposes and capabilities*

Mr. Naylor stated that this moral capability is based on one of the Bahá'í teachings, which states: 'Consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving mention'. Students are encouraged not to dwell on the unpleasant things of life, and to set their sights on higher goals and try to achieve them. The staff give the students examples of various studies that signify the importance of setting goals. The importance of service with purity of motive rather than self-centredness is emphasised. Role plays are used to demonstrate individuals opposing their lower passions and striving for a goal. Moreover, within the NCCI curriculum students see about eight plays a year, which provide tremendous examples of characters that have pursued high motives or lower motives and the end results of these, thus enabling the students to see and reflect on the characters in the play.

*Third: Managing one's affairs and responsibilities with rectitude of conduct based on moral and ethical principles*

This moral capability emphasises the issue of trustworthiness in all areas of life, whether it be the family, an organisation, a city, a country or the world. One of the exercises the students do is to imagine that they have a confidential problem they need to discuss with somebody else. Then they have to choose a real person in their own mind to whom to tell their problem. They are asked to write down that person's qualities and to come up with a list of virtues. They are then asked the reason they have chosen that person. Turning the example around, the students are asked if 'they are' such a person. Thus, they see the importance of character and understand why they must have these virtues if they want to be successful in life.

*Fourth: Learning from systematic reflection upon action within a consistent framework*

Mr. Naylor believes that the greatest amount of understanding for this capability is gained during the creative dance/theatre workshops and the service projects in which the students participate. This moral capability suggests that one has to take a step to do something. What is taught to the students is that one has to have a desire to want to serve and one has to begin doing something. One has to think before taking that step –plan it, take action and then reflect on the action taken to see how it could be improved or what will be the next stage for the development of that line of action. Thus, they learn that life and their actions are action and reflection processes. One without the other may lead to problems.

Through the dance workshops, where ultimately people's hearts are touched and they respond, the students get an immediate reaction to their performance and see that it has caused a social change. However, in order to reflect systematically on the issue of how to make a change, the students reflect and consult to see if they can discuss where they can affect the understanding of a group more deeply. They talk about what activities can be carried out to help a particular situation, what questions can be asked and what that particular group needs to know so that the group's understanding is enhanced.

*Fifth: Perceiving and interpreting the significance of current events and trends in light of an appropriate historical perspective*

The students are taught about cause and effect. They learn that things do not just happen, rather that they are the result of a chain of events and related to strategic interventions that will cause change. In order to make change, one has to understand that people come from different backgrounds with different upbringings. Therefore,

if one understands others' historical perspectives it will enlighten the individual as to why people react to situations in a particular way. This will allow one to treat another with understanding in a non-judgemental way. It will also allow one to cause a transformation to take place and help others to move from one place to another.

These concepts are most easily understood in history courses when the students look at social issues and are encouraged to ask the why and what questions, such as: Why is there prejudice? Why is there racism? Why is there inequality between men and women? What has happened historically that has created these situations?

Some of the *Moral Capabilities* can easily be integrated into subject areas. However, those which cannot be dealt with directly through subject areas are covered during world citizenship classes or through other activities such as the mentorship programme, service activities or the responsibility management committee.

*Sixth: Thinking systematically and strategically in the search for solutions*

The students are taught that usually resources are limited and in order to make changes one does not always have what one needs. Therefore, one should be able to assess a situation and see at what point one can intervene and in what way. This assessment is similar to the art of acupuncture where a tiny intervention of a needle placed strategically in the right place can have a profound effect on the body's whole system.

Mr. Naylor gave the example of a situation where another school invited the dance workshop to help with the racism problem at that school. The students started consulting as to the best way to approach this task. The result of the consultation was that, in the first instance, their own attitude should be one which says, 'We are

people like you who have chosen to see our differences as a source of unity and strength in our group instead of a source of disunity'. Then the students consulted again on ways in which they could support the school without preaching at them. They created different games and activities for the whole-day session. Different things were happening in different corners of the hall. In one corner, for example, they were filming people talking about racism and issues connected with it. Students would go from one corner to another and gradually increase their understanding through different activities. The NCCI students also gave a performance. The vice-principal of NCCI also organised a workshop with the staff of the visited school when they recognised that they were supporting racism indirectly through their remarks during classes. In this case, these services were used to enable strategic thinking in order to make changes.

*Seventh: Forming a common vision of a desirable future based on shared values and principles, and articulating this in a way that inspires us to work towards its realisation*

Mr. Naylor maintains that this capability acknowledges that most people who are capable leaders are able to articulate a vision which people desire and feel is true. Such leaders inspire people. Once again, this moral capability is taught through creative dance/theatre workshops, different service projects, oral English classes where students have to make speeches and through practising the art of consultation in all areas of the school. The students are encouraged to get up and talk about a world free of racism, inequality or any issue at the heart of social needs. They are encouraged to find out what other students want and what they are hoping to achieve. The feedback they receive assists them to understand whether they have articulated the vision properly. Through exploring spiritual and social principles, the students

realise that they have a social responsibility to a greater entity than their own selves, and to the degree that they are able to do this it creates its own sense of reward.

*Eighth: Imbuing one's actions and thoughts with love*

One of the ways in which this moral capability is facilitated at the school is through consultation as a large group. The topic would be encouragement and how individuals can increase their understanding and compassion for each other. If there has been a situation where gossip and backbiting has taken place there will be consultation about that issue, which will address questions such as: Why is this a test for some people? Why do they get engaged in it? The staff, through the mentorship programme, responsibility management team and other areas, gradually teach that if individuals imbue their actions and thoughts with love they will not ascribe poor motives to other people. The staff assist the students to think about what they have done and how their action fits with a particular moral capability. Therefore, the students become accountable for what they are doing and how it affects others.

The staff teach the students that service is an expression of love; that it is not enough to express your love in words for another but to do something that will demonstrate your care, consideration and thoughtfulness. The staff relate the expression of love through deeds to the students' families in terms of what the parents do for them in order for them to have all these opportunities to learn.

*Ninth: Encouraging others and bringing happiness into their hearts*

Mr. Naylor believes that the dance workshops are a great place to learn this moral capability because the best place to learn this is in a situation where the students have to take risks. When the students perform for others at different high schools the

responses are not always positive or supportive. The staff teach the students that they will be able to be strong through their unity. The students are encouraged to say their prayers before they perform and strive to be in a state of unity. The Bahá'í writing which states that, 'So powerful is the light of unity that it can illumine the whole earth', is shared with the students and they are supported to be always in an encouraging environment where they encourage each other.

In the performances during the Spring Festival and the Fall Festival, people who have never done solo performances before and would like to do so are encouraged by their peers and supported throughout the process. One year the grade nine decided to do a fashion show, and this was totally supported and encouraged by the senior students who were clapping for them at the performance and encouraging them. The senior students see themselves as mentors to the younger ones and, in this sense, there is no separation between the grades in terms of their attitudes. At this function, many of the retailers had loaned clothes to the students and were present as the audience. They also noticed the encouragement that was coming from the senior students, who did not jeer the performers but said they looked cute and great. One of the retail ladies, who was overwhelmed with so much love pouring from the audience, commented that, 'These students really love each other'.

*Tenth: Taking initiative in a creative and disciplined way*

Mr. Naylor informed me that the school sets up different mechanisms to encourage students to take initiatives. There is a suggestion box the students can use and the teachers create an open atmosphere where students can have an input. The school's consultative framework encourages initiatives because it implies that the school does not have anything crystallised and that everything is open for discussion. When there

is a better idea, there is always willingness to change. The staff listen very carefully to the students' complaints and work with the students to turn their suggestions into action that will make a difference. The students know what they say is taken seriously.

Great encouragement and rewards come from students and staff when a student takes initiative and action, whether they are performing or doing a project in class. This is shared at the morning assembly. These activities create a dynamic relationship between the initiator and the reaction and the response, where students are encouraged to see what other initiatives they can take.

The morning assemblies are designed to have a communal experience, where students and staff can affirm the oneness of the school and that everybody is one. At the morning assembly, prayers are said and readings from the sacred scriptures are shared together so that everyone has a few moments to reflect as to the purpose of one's existence and being.

*Eleventh: Sustaining effort, persevering and overcoming obstacles*

The students are taught this moral capability through staff assisting them to sustain projects to the conclusion. In this way the students are taught that most great things are accomplished through perseverance. These projects may be service projects that students select, or relationships that they are building and the initiatives they take to perform for the Spring or Fall Festival. The founder feels privileged to be part of the whole range of activities in which the school participates and brings into fruition, and the book record testifies to this. The students have demonstrated their capabilities through service and persevered through difficult situations to contribute positively to

issues. The students have been supported by staff through mentorship and seeing staff as positive role models.

*Twelfth: Participating effectively in consultation*

The best way to help the students and staff develop this skill is to practise it. The staff endeavour to enhance students' understanding of the concept of consultation at the beginning of the year during the orientation week, and during classes and other programmes. The staff explain that this concept reflects that truth belongs to the group, that truth can come from any person no matter how humble or how learned, that one has to have the utmost respect for other people, and that one is bound from a moral point of view to express what one thinks and feels in a loving manner. This process of consultation is applied to every situation in the school so that the students can see the effect of consultation, and recognise and learn how to draw support and intelligence from everyone's point of view.

When the school wanted to take a stand on the issue of smoking, a consultation took place on making a policy on this issue. The issue was explored and the principles were identified. These were that it was recognised that smoking is not healthy because it is an addictive and destructive habit, and smoking from a Bahá'í point of view is left up to the individual, although it is discouraged. It was identified that the students should not be in situations that would attract them to smoking. It was decided to break the social cycle by charging a \$20 fine if students were seen smoking at any time, anywhere. This made sure that smoking groups did not form right outside the school, that students who did not smoke were not going out of their way to be part of the group and that smoking was not in the face of students who did not smoke. Students caught for smoking would be encouraged to take a course after



two warnings. These issues developed over time, and open consultation and information sharing with students created an environment in which the students agreed with the principle by understanding the reasons behind it. The students understood that such laws came from genuine care for their well-being and it was not about power or control. This understanding caused some smokers to give up, and some to be more vigilant and not to try and influence others.

*Thirteenth: Building Unity in Diversity*

This is the school's theme. This moral capability is promoted by explaining that there should never be any social or physical pressure put on anyone to force them to believe differently than they do. This theme acknowledges that everyone is searching for truth about different issues and that individuals are free to share that, but only to the level of learning and not trying to indoctrinate people or force them into a particular direction.

The various school committees express the diversity of age, race, gender or any other issue. The staff raise awareness by explaining that it is through using the strength of diversity that we can build a strong unity. The students are encouraged to present papers on this theme, perform dances in the workshops and discuss it openly with their mentors.

*Fourteenth: Committing oneself to empowering educational activities as a student and as a teacher*

All staff and students are encouraged to understand that they are in a learning position. The establishment of the concept that everyone is a learner empowers people to realise that everyone has a responsibility to enrich the learning

environment. To achieve this aim, the school endeavours to make classes interactive. The different learning styles are acknowledged and lessons cater for diversity.

Barriers that separate the staff from the students are broken. For example, staff and students eat together and enjoy each other's conversations. During the sharing of a meal, the learning environment is safe and encouraging. It is one of the suitable times to have consultation with students about how to improve the school.

A video about the school that is shown to the parents is also shown to the students and they are invited to comment on whether the video really reflects NCCI. The students are invited to comment on what they like about the school and how it can be improved. In this way the students are involved in a reflection process. Often, students want to express their gratitude to the teachers for their help, and this is an occasion for building and sharing a lot of love. The students are also very open about what they think should be improved. The staff attitude is that students' opinions are highly important. Changes made due to the students' suggestions impress the students and they see that the educational environment is an ongoing development through the use of consultation.

*Fifteenth: Recognising relationships of domination and contributing to transformation into relationships based on interconnectedness, reciprocity and cooperation*

The type of relationship encouraged at the school is that of humble fellowship. Students feel that other students and teachers are their friends and they can confide in them. However, if there is a situation where they feel power is being misused, they are encouraged to report it. For example, on one occasion, a teacher had asked a boy to take his hat off, whereas a girl who was also wearing a hat was not asked to remove it. The boy reported the matter to the principal who communicated this to the

teacher and the teacher acknowledged that his decision was unjust. He graciously apologised to the student. In this case the student felt that their complaint was accepted and they were profoundly affected by the teacher's attitude. The teacher had the chance to model maturity and be humble. This experience did not weaken the teacher, rather it showed that everybody's judgement is held accountable to the *Moral Capabilities*. As the students get a sense of being treated with genuine respect and love, they want to share that respect and love with other people, and the open environment does not cause them to criticise teachers.

*Sixteenth: Contributing to the establishment of justice*

One of the ways the school addresses this moral capability is by asking the students at the beginning of the year, during consultations, about the unfortunate things that have happened to them in their lives. The staff then try to bring out the issues and categorise them. For example, some of them might fall under a particular type of prejudice. The staff then work with students in smaller groups to develop a list of issues which they think need addressing. This develops the students' skills in perceiving the connection between the injustice that might have happened to them and larger issues that require education. Once this connection is perceived, the students' commitment and contribution to bringing about a state of justice by consulting with people and educating people on the social issues is increased.

The students are also encouraged to create dances or skits on issues to comment on them. Once, one of the students developed a song about being fat and girls' images. She commented on the issue of social pressure for girls to look and dress in a certain way. Such performances have been very powerful and effective.

*Seventeenth: Serving in societal institutions so as to facilitate the expression of the talents of others that are affected by these institutions*

The students are encouraged to serve on internal institutions, such as the student council, or on community projects as volunteers. Sometimes the students go out and organise volunteers and help with community projects. These are all empowering service roles that help develop the person's moral character through social role taking. The staff try to make sure that students are involved in positions of power and influence as either the founder or developer of a project so that they are in a position to empower others to participate. In these positions, the students are assisted to learn to be humble, and to make space for others to contribute and manifest their talents and capabilities. The students are taught that a good leader is someone who, at the end of the task, acknowledges everyone's contribution and the team effort.

*Eighteenth: Being a responsible and loving family member as a child or spouse or parent*

The staff talk about gratefulness and encourage the students to be grateful to their parents who have paid for them to be at the school. The students are taught to be appreciative of their families' sacrifice, support and love, and they are asked to reflect on that and decide how they will repay their parents' sacrifice. The students are encouraged to talk to their parents, and share with them what they are learning and how they feel. The dorm parents encourage the students to call their parents and to be aware of the feelings of parents who have sent them away to school.

The students are taught that the school is like a family of sisters and brothers. By extending the family concept to a larger group they are being trained about their moral responsibility toward their siblings. The students are taught to be kind and encouraging rather than critical and nasty.

Through world citizenship classes the students are taught about being a responsible family member, and how to appreciate and value the gifts that are given to them. The dorm parents are in close contact with students and their families, and convey the students' and parents' concerns to each group. The school works very closely with all families, communicating and consulting on activities at school.

*Nineteenth: Cultivating and creating a sense of beauty in every endeavour*

The school added this capability to the eighteen other *Moral Capabilities*. It was felt that this moral capability was important as part of moral development. Feeling good about oneself is to make the environment beautiful. This moral development applies to the students' notebooks, rooms, themselves and all other aspects of their lives. The Bahá'í writings indicate that physical cleanliness has a profound effect on spirituality. The school recognises that the human soul desires beauty. The process of any accomplished task is also very important; one can not get to a good place in a bad way. When opportunities are used to create beauty in the process of achievement, the learning experiences are far more powerful and memorable.