

1 What we are trying to achieve.

A The Aims

40 min

Ask the group to brainstorm what they feel the aims of the children's classes are. List their answers, in brief, on the flip-chart. 5 mins

When everyone has made their contributions, explain that we are going to look in the Writings to see what aims are given by the Central Figures.

Divide the group into 2s. Ask each pair to read each of the following quotes carefully. Ask them to think what the statement implies about our aims for the classes, and make notes for reporting back their ideas. Direct them to spend 2 or 3 minutes on each quote, considering carefully what it means. 20 mins

Afterwards spend several minutes as a whole group, allowing the pairs to explain and compare their feelings and ideas. 15 mins

“We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge”

(Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, page 57)

“The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.”

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 156-157)

“But the indispensable basis of all is that he should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education, p44 C of C page 282)

“But education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man. Human education signifies civilization and progress -that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for 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." This is the goal of the world of humanity.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Some Answered Questions, page 8)

“Our meaning is that the friends must direct their attention toward the education and training of all the children so that all of them, having, in the school of true learning, achieved the power of understanding and come to know the inner realities of the universe, will go on to uncover the signs and mysteries of God, and will find themselves illumined by the lights of the knowledge of the Lord, and by His love. This truly is the very best way to educate all peoples.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p39, CofC page 277)

“Every child is potentially the light of the world - and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God's love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, pages 130-131)

B To be a Bahá'í

30 mins

Ask someone to read the following quotation, and then encourage the group to consult on the questions.

5 mins

“ O thou who gazest upon the Kingdom of God! Thy letter was received and we note that thou art engaged in teaching the children of the believers, that these tender little ones have been learning The Hidden Words and the prayers and what it meaneth to be a Baha'i.

The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Baha'i obligations and Baha'i conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that `Baha'i' is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so

that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word `Baha'i', if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.

Strive then to the best of thine ability to let these children know that a Baha'i is one who embodieth all the perfections, that he must shine out like a lighted taper - not be darkness upon darkness and yet bear the name `Baha'i'."

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, page 143*)

1. `Abdu'l-Bahá assures us that the instruction given will yield the desired results. He says this is especially true in two areas -- what are they?
2. The children must be aware in their heart and soul that Bahá'í is not just a name but a What?
3. Why must the children be trained in the things of the spirit?
- 4 We must strive to let the children know that a Bahá'í is one who

We are told that our aim is for the child to 'embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God' . Together brainstorm what these virtues are, and what will make them this source of glory. 5 mins

After everyone has given their ideas and any comments have been made, explain that we are going to look at what `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us a good Bahá'í should be. 20 mins

Play quiet music while the following passage is read quietly.

"I must, therefore, give you my instructions and exhortations today, and these are none other than the teachings of Baha'u'llah.

You must manifest complete love and affection toward all mankind. Do not exalt yourselves above others, but consider all as your equals, recognizing them as the servants of one God. Know that God is compassionate toward all; therefore, love all from the depths of your hearts, prefer all religionists before yourselves, be filled with love for every race, and be kind toward the people of all nationalities. Never speak disparagingly of others, but praise without distinction. Pollute not your tongues by speaking evil of another. Recognize your enemies as friends, and consider those who wish you evil as the wishers of good. You must not see evil as evil and then compromise with your opinion, for to treat in a smooth, kindly way one whom you consider evil or an enemy is hypocrisy, and this is not worthy or allowable. You must consider your enemies as your friends, look upon your evil-wishers as your well-wishers and treat them accordingly. Act in such a way that your heart may be free from hatred. Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart. Assist the world of humanity as much as possible. Be the source of consolation to every sad one, assist every weak one, be helpful to every indigent one, care for every sick one, be the cause of glorification to every lowly one, and shelter those who are overshadowed by fear.

In brief, let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of the world of humanity. Be trustworthy, sincere, affectionate and replete with chastity. Be illumined, be spiritual, be divine, be glorious, be quickened of God, be a Baha'i."

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 452-453*)

Explain that we are now going to reflect on these words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s. The following phrases from the passage will be repeated, and an interval of a minute will be allowed between each for quiet reflection. Ask everyone to ponder these phrases within the context of educating children to become like this.

1. “manifest complete love and affection toward all mankind.”
2. “consider all as your equals..”
3. “prefer all religionists before yourselves..”
4. “be filled with love for every race..”
5. “praise without distinction..”
6. “Pollute not your tongues by speaking evil of another...”
7. “Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts....”
8. “Assist the world of humanity as much as possible.”
9. “Be the source of consolation to every sad one,”
10. “ assist every weak one”....
11. “care for every sick one”.....
12. “be the cause of glorification to every lowly one”
13. “shelter those who are overshadowed by fear...”
14. “Be trustworthy, sincere, affectionate and replete with chastity...”

C The National Curriculum

30 mins

We have looked at the aim of becoming truly Bahá’í in character. But we also want the children to become functioning members of the administrative system, with a thorough understanding of how it works, as well as having a knowledge of the history of the Faith.

“The deepening and enrichment of the spiritual life of the individual believer, his increasing comprehension of the essential verities underlying this Faith, his training in its administrative processes, his understanding of the fundamentals of the Covenants established by its Author and the authorised Interpreter of its teachings should be made the supreme objectives of the national representatives responsible for the edification, the progress and consolidation of these communities.”

(Shoghi Effendi: Letters to Aust. and New Zealand, page 93)

Aims of the Curriculum

15 mins

When we start to look at detailed aims we can be quite daunted by the enormity of it. To help us the National Curriculum has simplified and organised all the elements into a usable document that we will be referring to as we go on.

Turn to page 28 (Appendix 2). The second half of the page summarises the aim of the education we are trying to give. Ask the friends to take turns reading from: “Perhaps, more simply,”.... to the end of the page.

Attainment Targets

The aims of the National Curriculum are called attainment targets. Ask the friends to take turns reading from the last para on p29”Before we get into the details...” right through to the bottom of p31. (Appendix 3).

What is read here should all be self evident, but if people have questions, direct them to the group as a whole (including yourself) for discussion.

To conclude this programme ask each person to summarise briefly, in their own words, what they think the aims of the children’s classes should be.

10 mins