

3 What are we to teach?

A Reflection

5 mins

Begin by playing soft music while someone reads these two quotations very slowly, allowing a minute or two after each for quiet reflection.

“Consider, for instance, the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it. This education is of two kinds. The one is universal. Its influence pervadeth all things and sustaineth them. It is for this reason that God hath assumed the title, "Lord of all worlds." The other is confined to them that have come under the shadow of this Name, and sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation.”

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 189-190)

“Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 259)

B The National Curriculum

20 mins

Explain that the field of Bahá'í knowledge is vast, and that this Revelation encompasses every aspect of our lives, and of human endeavour. How then are we to set about selecting topics from this vastness for educating the children?

Ask someone to read these two quotes from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“They must be given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened.”

*(‘Abdu’l-Baha: Extract from a talk cited in Bahá'í World Vol 9 p543
Education p79, CofC page 310)*

“If this activity is well organized, rest thou assured that it will yield great results. Firmness and steadfastness, however, are necessary, otherwise it will continue for some time, but later be gradually forgotten. Perseverance is an essential condition. In every project firmness and steadfastness will undoubtedly lead to good results; otherwise it will exist for some days, and then be discontinued.”

(*Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... Abdu'l-Baha, pages 143-144*)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi specify that the education we give must be both ‘systematic’ and ‘organised’, and that we must be ‘firm’, ‘steadfast’ and must ‘persevere’.

Explain that to help us in this, we are going to look at ‘Waiting upon the Blessed Beauty -- a National Curriculum for the Bahá’í Education of Children in the United Kingdom’, published by the National Spiritual Assembly.

Explain that there tends to be a lot of confusion over what a curriculum is, and what it is not. We are going to try to clarify this and then go on to see how to make the best use of this document.

What is a curriculum?

Several examples which explain this are given in the Curriculum document. Ask someone to read ‘How is a curriculum different from a syllabus?’ on pages 21 - 23. (Appendix 6)

To explain further: Imagine that you are teaching a child to make a large and complicated model aeroplane which will take many sessions. Each session you make a different bit -- cutting up pieces of wood, sticking them on, and finally painting the model.

Each session and what you do in it: a lesson

The sum of all the bits and pieces you use: a syllabus

The plan you are following of the finished product: a curriculum

The child may not be aware of the syllabus, or the curriculum, only of the individual lessons, but you as the teacher need to have all three, otherwise the whole model will never be satisfactorily completed.

When we apply this to our children’s classes, we have:

The detailed activity of each session: a lesson

A list of things to be covered over a period of time a syllabus

The overall plan for the child’s whole education -- ages 3-16 - and the thinking, or rationale behind it. a curriculum

At this point it would be helpful for everyone to read through section four of the curriculum document, (page 24) which explains why a curriculum is so necessary. (Appendix 7)

Have people take turns, and allow time for comments, questions etc.

Make sure everyone understands what a curriculum is not:

The curriculum is an overall plan.

It does not tell you the order to teach things in.

It does not tell you how to teach.

It does not tell you to teach only one subject at a time.

Therefore, it leaves the community school, and the individual teacher, very free to develop their own ways of doing things, as they feel is appropriate in their circumstances.

Attainment Targets and Strands

15 mins

In part 1 of our programme we were looking at the aims of our classes, and we referred to the Curriculum document, pages 29 - 31, which explain that the Attainment Targets are the Aims of the curriculum. (Appendix 3)

Turn now to page 31, (end of Appendix 3) where we see that the aims of the curriculum are divided into three main areas:

A spiritual and moral character	(AT 1)
Knowledge and understanding of the Bahá'í Faith	(AT 2)
Skills appropriate to the life of a Bahá'í.	(AT 3)

These are the Attainment Targets, (abbreviated to AT1, AT2 and AT3)

Each Attainment Target is broken into more detail, and these are called Strands.

Attainment Target 1, a spiritual and moral character, has four strands:

- a) Spirituality
- b) Morality
- c) Sacrifice
- d) Service

Attainment Target 2, Acquisition of knowledge has six strands:

- a) Laws
- b) Teachings
- c) History and Key Figures
- d) Covenant and administration
- e) Sacred Scriptures
- f) Other Divinely Revealed Religions

Attainment Target 3, skills appropriate to the life of a Bahá'í, has four strands:

- a) Individual Skills
- b) Family Skills
- c) Social Skills
- d) Administrative Skills

Very simply, these strands and attainment targets are the structure of the curriculum. Our aim as teachers is to try to balance our lesson planning so that we cover each of these strands over a period of time, and the children are not taught a huge amount in one area, while others are neglected completely.

Key Stages

Although there is a lot to be covered, a child attending children's classes from the age of 2 ½ to 16 has a lot of time to fit everything in. Children of different ages obviously need to be educated in different ways. For example, when a child is 4 it may be appropriate to teach social skills by playing games which require taking turns. At age 14 it may be appropriate to teach and practise Bahá'í consultation skills. Both are taken from the same Attainment Target and Strand, but the lesson is completely different.

Obviously the way a child is taught needs to be appropriate to its age, and the same topic needs to be dealt with several times at different levels, as the child matures.

To help us with this the Curriculum groups children into five Key Stages, according to their age.

Key Stage 0: 2½ - 4 years

Key Stage 1: 4 - 7 years

Key Stage 2: 7 - 11 years

Key Stage 3: 11 - 14 years

Key Stage 4: 14 - 16 years

Ask everyone to look at page 43 in the curriculum document where this is laid out very clearly. (Appendix 8)

C Deriving lessons from the curriculum

10 mins

The different strands of the curriculum are very much inter-related. For example: In one lesson we might aim to have the children memorise part of the Visitation Prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“He is the All-Glorious!

O Lord, my God! Give me Thy grace to serve Thy loved ones, strengthen me in my servitude to Thee, illumine my brow with the light of adoration in Thy court of holiness, and of prayer to Thy Kingdom of grandeur. Help me to be selfless at the heavenly entrance of Thy gate, and aid me to be detached from all things within Thy holy precincts. Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest.....”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, pages 319-320)

In such a lesson with children at Key Stage 2 (age 7 - 11), we may include the following

elements:

- a) We may start by making sure everyone knows who ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is. (Remember we may have new Bahá’í children in the class who don’t know).
- b) We could introduce the idea of the spiritual connection of the individual with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and how a Tablet of Visitation brings us close to Him.
- c) We may want to explore the concepts of servitude and sacrifice - trying to think of ways to practise these virtues at home during the coming week.
- d) We may try to develop a devotional attitude.
- e) We may explore in a limited way the importance of prayer - and that some are obligatory and others not.

All these may go into one lesson, but we are drawing on many strands in the curriculum: With page 43 (Appendix 8) of the curriculum open, brainstorm together which strands of the curriculum are being dealt with during the lesson above.

Now together read through the following analysis:

Attainment Target 1 - Acquisition of a spiritual and moral character:

Strands:

- a) Spirituality: The use of prayer and development of a devotional attitude
- c) Sacrifice: Exploring the concept
- d) Service: Ditto

Attainment Target 2 - Acquisition of knowledge and understanding:

Strands:

- a) Laws: Mentioning briefly the concept of the obligatory prayers.
- b) Teachings: Sacrifice and service are both included here.
- c) History and Key Figures: The person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
- e) Sacred Scriptures: The Visitation Prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Attainment Target 3 - Acquisition of skills:

Strands:

- a) Individual skills: Prayer
- b) Family skills: Practising service and sacrifice at home
- c) Social skills: Practising service and sacrifice at home and elsewhere

An exercise:

30 mins

Divide the group into 2s and ask everyone to choose each of the following lessons and to do a similar analysis, ticking the places in the table that are covered by this lesson. After the allotted time span bring everyone back to report to the group.

See Appendix 11 for an analysis of the three plans.

Lesson I: Key Stage 2**Theme: The Tree of Life**

- a) Games in which we have to cooperate.
- b) The web of life -- game with a piece of string to show how all parts of nature are inter-dependent
- c) Looking at trees -- how a tree is haven and food supply for so many creatures
- d) The symbolism of the Tree of Life in other religions.
- e) The symbolism of the 'Tree of Life' in the Bahá'í Writings-- the Sadrat' u'l-Muntaha.
- d) The Tablet of Ahmad - "He is the Tree of Life that bringeth forth the fruits of God" - discussion as to what are the 'Fruits of God'.

AT I: Acquisition of spiritual and moral character	Strands: a) Spirituality b) Morality c) Sacrifice d) Service
AT 2: Acquisition of knowledge and understanding	a) Laws b) Teachings c) History and key figures d) Covenant and admin e) Sacred scriptures f) Other religions
AT 3 :Acquisition of skills	a) Individual b) Family c) Social d) Administrative

Lesson II: Theme: Justice**Key Stage 4**

- a) Defining 'Justice' - using dictionary
- b) Study of how an understanding of justice has been progressive through the Dispensations
- c) In the time of Moses
- d) Of Christ
- e) Of Mohammed
- f) Study of the 2nd Hidden Word
- g) Understanding this in the context of the prohibition against backbiting

AT I: Acquisition of spiritual and moral character	Strands: a) Spirituality b) Morality c) Sacrifice d) Service
AT 2: Acquisition of knowledge and understanding	a) Laws b) Teachings c) History and key figures d) Covenant and admin e) Sacred scriptures f) Other religions
AT 3: Acquisition of skills	a) Individual b) Family c) Social d) Administrative

Lesson 3**Theme: Myself****Key Stage 1**

- a) Body parts -- drawing round each other, labelling simple diagrams
- b) Keeping healthy in order to serve God
- c) Cleanliness
- d) Having a spiritual part of us that needs to speak to God
- e) Learning a simple prayer
- f) Learning that we have to help each other

AT I: Acquisition of spiritual and moral character	Strands: a) Spirituality b) Morality c) Sacrifice d) Service
AT 2: Acquisition of knowledge and understanding	a) Laws b) Teachings c) History and key figures d) Covenant and admin e) Sacred scriptures f) Other religions
AT 3: Acquisition of skills	a) Individual b) Family c) Social d) Administrative

A second exercise - Broadening the scope**15 mins**

By referring back to the curriculum in this way you may have found that you could have included elements from other strands into your lessons. You do not have to include every strand in every lesson - that would be completely unrealistic, but you may find you can enrich and broaden the scope of the lessons by introducing small elements from elsewhere in the curriculum. You will probably feel that each of these contains too much to work into one lesson.

Maybe you can broaden each of these themes to make a whole series of lessons encompassing most of the strands.

Ask the participants to take the theme of one of the lessons and broaden it to include more strands from the curriculum. Is it suitable to become the theme for a whole term's work? Encourage people to share their ideas.