

4 Ethos

Our classroom will have an atmosphere whether we like it or not. What kind of atmosphere do we want? And what can we do to bring it about?

A

20 mins

Read the following passages. Then enter, in the table below, as many answers as you can find in the passages.

“As to thy question regarding the education of children: it behoveth thee to nurture them at the breast of the love of God, and urge them onward to the things of the spirit, that they may turn their faces unto God; that their ways may conform to the rules of good conduct and their character be second to none; that they make their own all the graces and praiseworthy qualities of humankind; acquire a sound knowledge of the various branches of learning, so that from the very beginning of life they may become spiritual beings, dwellers in the Kingdom, enamoured of the sweet breaths of holiness, and may receive an education religious, spiritual, and of the Heavenly Realm. Verily will I call upon God to grant them a happy outcome in this.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, page 142)

“In thy school, instruct thou God's children in the customs of the Kingdom. Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness. Tend the young trees of the Abha Paradise with the welling waters of His grace and peace and joy. Make them to flourish under the downpour of His bounty. Strive with all thy powers that the children may stand out and grow fresh, delicate, and sweet, like the ideal trees in the gardens of Heaven.

All these gifts and bounties depend upon love for the Beauty of the All-Glorious, and on the blessings in the teachings of the Most High, and the spiritual instructions of the Supreme Concourse, and on ecstasy and ardour and diligent pursuit of whatsoever will redound to the eternal honour of the community of man.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 273)

“The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.

Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reapings of lustful appetites. Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit, and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will be not illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not some embellishment on its facade.

It followeth that the children's school must be a place of utmost discipline and order, that instruction must be thorough, and provision must be made for the rectification and refinement of character; so that, in his earliest years, within the very essence of the child, the divine foundation will be laid and the structure of holiness raised up.

Know that this matter of instruction, of character rectification and refinement, of heartening and encouraging the child, is of the utmost importance, for such are basic principles of God.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, pages 136-137)

What is the teacher asked to do?

- 1 Nurture them at the breast of the love of God
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

What qualities are to be nurtured in the child?

- 1 Freshness
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

What conditions should pertain in the classroom?

- 1 Love
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

What can we do make our classroom have the right atmosphere, conducive to all these qualities? Brainstorm.

B Creating the right environment**15 min**

Ideas for enhancing the material environment of the room:

“The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? Is it within human power, O Hakim, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.”

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 200)

- 1 What can cleanse and revive the ‘corrosion of ungodliness’?
- 2 What is the only thing that has the capacity for ‘so great and far-reaching a change’?

“Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections .. `Abdu'l-Baha, page 292)

3. What is the Word of God capable of doing?
4. After reading these passages, what element do you think should be present and fundamental in every lesson?

The attitude of the teacher towards the children

10 min

“Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the center of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá Some Answered Questions p236

“Deny not My servant should he ask anything from thee, for his face is My face; be then abashed before Me.”

(Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, page 30)

What do you think should be the teacher’s attitude towards the children?

D Creating a climate of empathy, cooperation and mutual support. 5-10 mins

“In thy school, instruct thou God's children in the customs of the Kingdom. Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness. Tend the young trees of the Abha Paradise with the welling waters of His grace and peace and joy. Make them to flourish under the downpour of His bounty. Strive with all thy powers that the children may stand out and grow fresh, delicate, and sweet, like the ideal trees in the gardens of Heaven.”

(‘Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 273)

Brainstorm ideas of how this can be done.

Ideas to help establish an atmosphere of ‘unity’:

E Some strategies and ideas.

15 min

1) Circle games

There is a long list of circle games in the appendix (Appendix 12) so that you can experiment with different ones throughout the term.

Why are circle games so useful?

- 1) Used at the beginning of the lesson they:
 - break the ice,
 - make everyone feel at ease,
 - fully engage the attention of everyone
 - make everyone a participant, not just an observer
 - set the ethos of enjoyment, good humour and fun.
- 2) These games can be used for teaching a great variety of skills, many of which are the foundation of Bahá'í consultation, and of eloquent speech which is one of the things 'Abdu'l-Bahá specified we should teach.

Games can be deliberately selected to develop specific skills in each lesson as the term progresses.

skills needed for consultation:	listening skills
	ability to express oneself
	concentration skills
	thinking skills
	empathy

- 3) If well led, circle games can be used to encourage the reticent to express themselves and play an active part, and to teach self-discipline to the loquacious - no calling out, dominating the group etc.
- 4) They can help to develop good Bahá'í attitudes and behaviour patterns, thus improving the ethos of the classroom: "the customs of the Kingdom.....the rules and ways of His loving-kindness":
 - Cooperation
 - Empathy for others
 - Self respect
 - Respect for others and for diversity of person and thought
- 5) Some of the games provide a forum in which the children can put virtues into practice, rather than just learning about them as a theoretical exercise.

Establishing ground rules

If you want to get the desired outcome from the games its very important to establish and strictly maintain rules:

- Only speak when its your turn
- No calling out
- When speaking say only positive things - no negatives about other people
- Be careful never to hurt another's feelings
- No laughing at what others say (unless intended to be funny)
- Be gentle - no pushing

Be very strict about maintaining the rules - you could post them up on the wall for everyone to see, and use them to establish general rules for the whole session. Because children almost always love the games, an appropriate sanction is to be excluded from one game.

Circle Time -- a very brief introduction.

This is a teaching method being used more and more widely to promote positive behaviour and to develop the qualities of cooperation, empathy etc that we desire in Bahá'í classes. Very briefly the idea is this:

The whole class, including teachers and helpers, sits on chairs (if possible of equal size and type) in a circle. There are three types of activity during each session:

- a) Warming up games - to make everyone change places, and set the mood, and ending/calming games which may be good fun or meditative.
- b) The 'round' when a talking object is passed round and every child is expected to complete a sentence: e.g. 'My favourite part of the day is.....' If the child has nothing to say they may 'pass' but those who 'pass' are invited at the end of the round to make their contribution.
- c) The 'open forum' where different ideas may be developed, and all may contribute, but only after signalling to do so, and being invited by the leader. All sorts of topics can be dealt with here, but the key is 'communication' - of feelings as well as ideas. Children can say if they are having any problems, and the rest of the group can all think and suggest ways of helping. Children will develop an empathy for each others' problems and become supportive instead of critical.
Individuals will feel themselves supported instead of criticised.

Positive outcomes.

There are many, but to list a few:

- Establishing positive relations within the class.
- Creating a calm and positive classroom/school ethos.
- Making all the class members feel like valued members with a contribution to make.
- Enhancing self esteem/confidence.
- Developing self-discipline

The basic circle rules, as above, are very important and should be carefully enforced. They can be stuck up on the wall for all the adults and children to see.

F Behaviour management

20 min

"...Baha'i education, just like any other system of education, is based on the assumption that there are certain natural deficiencies in every child, no matter how gifted, which his educators, whether his parents, schoolmasters, or his spiritual guides and preceptors, should endeavour to remedy. Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but

actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Baha'i parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavour to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become "true sons of God" and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom. This is the high purpose which Baha'u'llah Himself has clearly defined as the chief goal of every education."

(Shoghi Effendi: Baha'i Education, page 303)

"The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is underdeveloped; it must be patiently trained...."

(“Promulgation of Universal Peace” p180)

"Whosoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse".

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, page 125)

Say what thoughts you have about the disciplining of children.

Some ideas:

- 1 The best way to manage the children's behaviour is through trying to pre-empt any difficulties before they happen. If the teacher can establish a bond of affection with children they are less likely to misbehave and more likely to want to please.
- 2 Rewards are better than punishments. Rewarding good behaviour reinforces that behaviour and raises the child's self-esteem. Punishing bad behaviour lowers self-esteem and the child is gaining the desired attention for the wrong reasons. A good idea would be to give stickers, or a child's name could be entered in a 'golden book' etc. Children could be allowed to choose music to listen to during lessons.
- 3 If a child is misbehaving in a small way, it is sometimes enough to praise a near-by child for behaving in an opposite, good way. For example, if a child is fidgeting, the teacher could say to another child, "Well done, John, for sitting so still", or "You did very well, Vahid, being so quiet during the prayers. Well done."
- 4 If a child is misbehaving, and you need to stop him, instead of speaking to him while everyone listens, you could draw an unhappy face on a piece of paper, and place it beside him where only he can see. He might appreciate the element of secrecy between the two of you and find it easy to respond.

- 5 If bad behaviour continues try to use an 'appropriate' sanction:
If you are in the middle of a game, make the child sit out. (Just for one game).
If you are working in a circle, make the child sit outwith the circle (for 2 or 3 minutes only - an egg timer is very good for this, as the child can see the passage of time and knows he will soon be allowed back.)
- 6 If a child appears to be unhappy / bored / disruptive etc you may feel its worth while co-opting another adult / youth to come in and work with the child. Often the child craves attention, and will be difficult until he gets it. We don't know his circumstances -- maybe he really does need more attention. Whatever happens, everyone is going to benefit from an extra helper. Remember, the welfare of the children is the responsibility of the whole school / community. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- 7 If a child remains uncooperative it may be that the work of the class, or the method, is inappropriate. Children have different capacities and may find the pace too slow or too fast. You may need an assistant to support an individual child, or you may allow a child to work alone, separate from the group, on their own project at their own pace. This is something that may suit an intelligent child. But make sure you are directing him, and having his feedback into the rest of the class.
- 8 If one child continually has difficulties getting on with the others, you could all consult together about this in the circle. Have the child tell the others how he feels, and ask the others for ideas how they could help. Ask one or two willing children to make a special effort in befriending and supporting the child. This is surprisingly effective in improving everyone's behaviour.
- 9 Encourage children to praise one another.

The Holy family

The ideal would be for the classroom atmosphere to resemble that of the Holy Family. Settle comfortably while listening to two accounts -- one of Bahá'u'lláh with children and one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

(See Appendix 9)