Fostering Wisdom in Youth through Moral Education in a Bahá'í-inspired School

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Abstract
This article reports a focused ethnographical study that examined the practices of an independent Bahá'í-inspired school that aspires to deliberately foster students' acquisition of wisdom as well as their capacity to be moral citizens who will contribute to the common good. The school's starting point is a Bahá'í belief that all humans have an innate potential for developing wise thinking and noble dispositions. Its key strategy is the deliberate use of an ethos-driven moral curriculum framed by nineteen moral capabilities designed to promote a deep understanding amongst staff and students of moral and prosocial thought and action. The aim is twofold: to enable students to develop wise thinking and noble behavior, and to equip them to contribute to the positive transformation of society. Drawing on the first author's sustained dialogue with the school leadership and immersive observation of the school's life world, this study explores the means used to advance these aims, and draws some preliminary conclusions about their effect. It finds that the day-to-day practices through which the nineteen moral capabilities framework is operationalized do incrementally transform students by fostering their wise thinking and moral action.

Résumé
Le présent article rend compte d'une étude ethnographique ciblée qui a examiné les méthodes d'une école indépendante d'inspiration bahá'íe cherchant à favoriser, chez les élèves, l'acquisition de la sagesse ainsi que la capacité d'être des citoyens moraux qui contribueront au bien commun. Le point de départ de l'école est la croyance bahá'íe selon laquelle tous les êtres humains possèdent le potentiel inné de développer une pensée sage et un caractère noble. Sa stratégie clé consiste à utiliser délibérément un programme moral axé sur l'éthique, conçu autour de dix-neuf compétences morales ayant pour objet de favoriser une profonde compréhension, chez le personnel et les élèves, d'une pensée et d'une conduite morales et prosociales. L'objectif est double : permettre aux élèves d'acquérir une pensée sage et un comportement noble, et leur donner les moyens de contribuer à une transformation positive de la société. S'appuyant sur le dialogue soutenu entre la première auteure et la direction de l'école ainsi que sur l'observation immersive du cadre de vie scolaire, cette étude explore les moyens utilisés pour atteindre ces objectifs et tire quelques conclusions préliminaires quant à leur efficacité. Elle permet de constater que les pratiques quotidiennes par lesquelles le cadre des dix-neuf compétences morales est mis en œuvre transforment progressivement les élèves en favorisant chez eux une pensée sage et une conduite morale.

Resumen
Este artículo informa sobre un enfocado estudio etnográfico el cual examinó las prácticas de una independiente escuela de

inspiración Bahá'í que aspira fomentar deliberadamente la adquisición de sabiduría por los estudiantes así como su capacidad de ser ciudadanos morales quienes contribuirán al bien común. El punto de partida de la escuela es una creencia Bahá'í que todos los seres humanos tienen un innato potencial para desarrollar pensamiento sabio y disposiciones nobles. Su estrategia clave es el uso deliberado de un currículo moral impulsado por etos en el marco de diecinueve capacidades morales diseñadas para promover un profundo entendimiento entre el personal y los estudiantes de pensamiento y acción morales y pro-sociales. El objetivo es doble: habilitar a los estudiantes a desarrollar pensamiento sabio y comportamiento noble y capacitarles para contribuir a la positiva transformación de la sociedad. Recurriendo al sostenido diálogo de la primera autora con el liderazgo de la escuela y una observación inmersiva de la vida escolar, este estudio explora los medios usados para avanzar estos objetivos, y llega a unas conclusiones preliminares acerca de su efecto. El estudio encuentra que las prácticas diarias por medio de las cuales el marco de estas diecinueve capacidades se operativiza, en efecto, transforma en forma progresiva a los estudiantes fomentando su pensamiento sabio y acción moral.

The purpose of moral education in schools can be stated simply: it aims to develop students' capabilities for determining what is right and wrong in their own and others' behavior and for understanding the reasoning behind moral decisions (Halstead and Pike 1–3). Kohlberg's theory of moral development highlights that moral reasoning is developmental; the individual's capacity for moral reasoning advances over stages as she develops and matures (26–28). Thus, as a primary site of socialization during childhood, schools play an important role in providing opportunities and support that will foster students' moral development over time.

If we further interrogate the purpose of moral education in schools, however—if we ask *why* we would want to help students develop moral reasoning, an understanding of right and wrong, and the ability to choose behaviors that align with a moral standard—we discover that the research on moral education in schools reveals diverse motivations for its inclusion in school curricula, and different desired impacts on student values and behavior. In some cases, schools' rationale for including moral education is to address students' antisocial behavior, and this goal also motivates some of the research in the field (Kidron and Fleischman; Freitas et al.). This kind of motivation can be attributed to a global perception of youth—and young adolescents in particular—as a potentially problematic group dealing with significant physical, social and emotional changes and challenges. In society generally, young people are often perceived as irresponsible and self-centered. This commonly held perception motivates educational theorists, leaders and educators to research effective ways to motivate and enable students to change their social behavior and develop capabilities for cooperative moral action and good citizenship. Moral education, in this

context, is framed in essentially negative terms, in the sense that it is used to address a deficiency or lack rather than being a good for its own sake.

A different set of motivations for researching moral education conceptualizes it as a positive good. Faith-based schools exemplify this: they adopt a structured and intentional approach in which moral education often occupies a central place in their curriculum, in support of their mission to inculcate the beliefs, values and practices of their particular religion and to graduate students who are moral thinkers and responsible members of society.

This article uses a case study of moral education in a Canadian Bahá'í-inspired school, Nancy Campbell Academy (NCA), to identify the intent behind the incorporation of moral education within their curriculum, explore the practices through which it is advanced, and assess (in preliminary form) the impact it has on the students' acquisition of wisdom. Nancy Campbell Academy was chosen as the case study because it is explicit about the motivation behind the inclusion of moral education: to develop students' moral capabilities and leadership skills by aligning with universal human values. The ultimate goal of NCA is to develop leaders with a world-embracing vision who believe in human nobility, are capable of applying moral principles to practical problems and situations, and contribute meaningfully to the betterment of society. Moral education, in this context, is far from a mere corrective to undesirable behavior, and is instead an integral component of a holistic education. The founder of NCA, Gordon Naylor, recognizes that nobility and wisdom are latent potentials within all youth and this understanding is central to the ethos and educational practices of the school.

Following from this premise, the curriculum for moral education is designed to awaken and develop students' innate capacity for nobility and wisdom.[1] NCA adopts a strengths-based approach in its curriculum and pedagogy that emphasizes the positive attributes of youth through communicative and social interactions. This is an explicitly positive, rather than deficit-centered, approach that recognizes youths' innate altruism and willingness to contribute to the betterment of the world; it reflects the Bahá'í perspective on young people, as described for instance by the Universal House of Justice:

> While global trends project an image of this age group as

1 NCA materials, leadership, and staff use a range of terms to describe the capacities they seek to foster in students. For the purposes of this paper, we use two terms—nobility and wisdom—that both resonate with the language used by NCA, and conceptually map on to the overall capacities it aims to develop, as well as (in the case of wisdom) to the literature on moral development. Nobility, as we use the term, is the individual's inherent potential for goodness, while wisdom represents the active expression and application of that potential. See below for greater elaboration on both definitions.

> problematic, lost in the throes of tumultuous physical and emotional change, unresponsive and self-consumed, the Bahá'í community—in the language it employs and the approaches it adopts—is moving decidedly in the opposite direction, seeing in junior youth instead altruism, an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. (Riḍván 2010)

In 2016, Sona Farid-Arbab outlined a significant challenge for Bahá'í inspired education, noting that Bahá'í inspired schools aim to graduate noble and wise humans who will become leaders for global peace and cooperation. Farid-Arbab also acknowledges that there is a growing number of examples of effective and innovative educational efforts aiming to achieve such aspirations. Despite these observations, she argues that "although much has been achieved over the decades, it has been clear to all who have contributed to these efforts that the vision of what may be called 'Bahá'í education' is a distant one." Our article makes no claim to actually articulate a vision of "Bahá'í education"; however, it does offer a detailed examination of one Bahá'í-inspired school and its attempts to provide a comprehensive curriculum in support of the primary goal of producing wise and noble global citizens who find joy in service to others. Rather than suggesting that this school is a prototype for all Bahá'í schools, we present the case study as a basis for further analysis, one that offers insights and approaches that can be considered, adopted, and adapted by others in the field.

Conceptual Background

Before turning to the case study, we will outline the general conceptual understandings that inform the study design and structure its observations. We will first highlight a few considerations about the concept of moral education and the pursuit of prosocial behavior in schools that are relevant for our study, before turning to the concept of wisdom as a specific outcome of moral education.

Moral Education and Prosocial Behavior

The literature on moral education frames the purpose of such education as fostering prosocial thinking and behavior. Zhang et al., for example, describe moral education as intending to generate at both social emotional learning and the behavior outcome of voluntary actions aimed at benefiting others (15031). In this framing, social emotional learning equips students with emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills, which are capacities that underpin moral reasoning and concern for others. These, in turn, support the emergence of voluntary prosocial actions. The challenge confronting educators, then, is to identify effective strategies to foster students'

ability to think in moral terms, and to inculcate the disposition to be concerned with moral behavior and with the wellbeing and benefit of others (Kidron and Fleischman; Freitas et al.).

Moral reasoning and prosocial behavior cannot be developed in a vacuum; they develop in response to an interactive environment. Human development studies have identified the emergence of moral emotions, such as guilt and empathy, in the child's early years. Malti et al. argue that social interactions with caregivers and others at this early stage are fundamentally important in children's development of capabilities for negotiating complex social and moral situations in everyday life using "moral and prosocial behavior" (4). The interactive environment of the school is the context for further development of these capabilities (Kohlberg).

Malti et al. distinguish between morality and sociality, noting that while they are strongly related, they are not the same. However, they affirm that moral development is "central to the emergence of socially responsible attitudes and values" (4). Faith and philosophical traditions have long shaped both how morality is understood on its own terms, and how it informs sociality, offering foundational insights for moral education. For example, Tan Tai Wei explains that a Confucian framework for moral education emphasizes the practice of just principles in interpersonal relationships—principles such as commitment, strength of will, and correct motive (i.e. goodwill to one's fellow humans rather than self-aggrandizement) (33–37). Such traditions offer enduring frameworks for moral education, emphasizing character formation, ethical intent, and meaningful relationships as essential to human development.

Most research in developmental psychology is understandably limited to the immediate context of children's lives, but if we frame the desired outcome for children as navigating an increasingly interconnected world in a moral way, then the broader global context assumes great importance. Peterson, for example, suggests that a more global education is needed in order to generate an expanded world view in children (247). Specifically, the development of children as global citizens requires an environment that provides a meaningful ethic for developing bonds between all human beings; such an ethic must promote in the child an understanding of global justice and a conception of the moral relationship between people that extends beyond national boundaries.

This is by no means an exhaustive exploration of the literature on moral education, but it does permit us to trace the broad requirements of an effective moral education curriculum. Moral education in schools requires more than the mere articulation and repetition of prosocial values. It requires a purposeful vision and, above all, active engagement. Learning to be moral global citizens requires complex, situated, and engaged processes, driven by tenets of inclusion and justice. A moral

education curriculum that supports this must be embedded within a dynamic, interactive environment that fosters prosocial thinking and reasoning and encourages meaningful action and interaction that reflect and reinforce prosocial behavior.

Wisdom

Moral education and wisdom are deeply interconnected. Wisdom, of course, is a complex concept,[2] but for the purposes of our study we use the term to indicate a human capacity, innate yet developmental, by which the individual applies their internalized moral framework to real-life situations in a contextually appropriate way. Wisdom thus requires knowledge but is not reducible to it; it is the ability to apply knowledge thoughtfully and ethically to create positive change in communities and the world.

This understanding of wisdom is reflected by a number of thinkers. Zhang et al., for instance, adopt a two-dimensional view of wisdom as encompassing both a disposition—altruism—and a behavioral element—creative problem-solving. Zhang et al. regard wisdom as a "global psychological quality that engages intellectual ability, prior knowledge and experience in a way that integrates both virtue (moral standards) and wit (intelligence) and is increased through life experiences and continued practice" (15031). Pascual-Leone similarly describes the wise person as one who, while being in the moment, conceptually and experientially integrates their knowledge and the multiplicity of their life experiences from an historical and cultural perspective. When this integration has sufficient breadth, depth and cohesion, wisdom appears. Such wisdom has the capacity to resolve contradictions between ideas regarding behavior, beliefs, actions, bodies of knowledge and the realities of life, while maintaining a concern for the interests and welfare of others (272). Pascual-Leone perceives wisdom to be different from either creativity or intelligence alone, because it not only involves cognition "but also affect and personality as a whole" (272). Like Zhang et al., Pascual-Leone sees altruism as a disposition that is core to wisdom: wisdom allows "a weakening of ego-centered characteristics, which leads to greater intuition and to an empathic understanding of other, self, world, and nature as equally strong concerns" (272).

Sternberg similarly describes wise practice as making "reflective responses that balance considerations in search for a common good" ("Why Schools Should Teach for Wisdom" 235). Elaborating on this point, he argues that

> wisdom is . . . about balance. It

2 Zhang et al., for example, argue that the definition of wisdom has become diffuse, filtered through each of the various disciplines—philosophy, psychology, gerontology, human development etc.—that has made it a focus of systematic study. Wisdom may also be defined differently based on the cultural and situational context in which it is being observed (15030).

> 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—to adapt, shape and select your environment over the short and long term in the service of a common good. ("Wisdom" 127)

Complementing the internal, reflective work of wisdom is its practical dimension. Staudinger explains that although collective knowledge becomes manifest in proverbs, wisdom is only contained in "their insightful application to a given problem" (283). Similarly, Kristjánsson, drawing on Aristotle, introduces the notion of phronesis, or practical wisdom, referring "to the capacity of knowing and enacting the right course of (moral) action through a process of identifying and deliberating between competing values, emotions and alternatives" (2). Nabobo argues that wisdom fosters balance, provoking in those who achieve it "insight, hope, and the ability to affirm their sense of identity" (41). These authors exhibit a common understanding of wisdom as more than the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge: rather, it is the appropriate use of that knowledge to empower individuals to face the challenges of life in a manner that is effective, both practically and morally.

The above observations suggest that wisdom is a complex and multifaceted quality that can be progressively developed. It integrates intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. It involves the application of knowledge and experience to balance individual and community interests. It includes empathy and a weakening of ego-centered characteristics and requires understanding and assessing situations to arrive at balanced, moral behavior whose ultimate aim is contributing to the betterment of the world.

Thus, where moral education is broadly aimed at cultivating character and virtue in individuals by fostering prosocial behavior and moral reasoning from an early age, wisdom education is the subset of moral education that hones the practical application of moral principles in real-life situations. Through wisdom education, individuals are motivated to nurture and develop their innate wisdom, and thus equipped to apply knowledge and ethical understanding to make thoughtful and balanced decisions that are compassionate and just. They become capable of navigating complex situations and resolving conflict in ways that consider the benefit of both the individual and the community.

A Bahá'í Approach to Moral Education and Wisdom

As a starting point for considering how a Bahá'í-inspired educational framework might approach moral education and the cultivation of wisdom in students, we can consider the concept of the nobility of the human being in

the Bahá'í writings. "Nobility" here describes a belief about the human being as such, regardless of background or social context: the essence of the human being is a creation in the image of God. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh says of the human being: "Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created" (Hidden Words Arabic no. 22). Moral education, then, is not about imposing an external standard upon a student conceived of as a blank slate—or much less as a problematic, antisocial individual. It is instead a project of uncovering and actualizing inherent nobility, of creating the conditions in which the seeds of innate goodness can germinate and grow.

This understanding is reinforced by further exploration of a Bahá'í ontology of the human being. The Universal House of Justice describes the noble essence of every person as a soul that potentially expresses all the attributes of God (1 March 2017). Thus, the soul has the capacity to reflect all divine attributes such as compassion, generosity, love and wisdom. Bahá'u'lláh states: "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" ("Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd"). The Bahá'í writings explain that these qualities are innate in all humans but remain dormant until recognized and developed. The mining metaphor implies that discovering and polishing these inner gems require effort.[3] Bahá'ís believe that the "reality of man"[4] is a latent potential "even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 27:3). 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the innate potential within human beings as a dimension of human reality that can be likened 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 are hidden and potential in the seed. (*Promulgation* 90)

While "education . . . alone" is the means for fostering the development of innate potential, this cannot be conceived of as a process imposed unilaterally by an outside authority on the individual. The Bahá'í writings make it clear that the individual's own volition is crucial to the process: "All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 77:1). The moral responsibility of aligning one's volition with a moral framework for behavior, and then acting according to that framework—i.e. both understanding and

3 See Pourshafie and Habel for further discussion on this point.

4 "Man" in the Bahá'í writings is used in the generic sense of human being unless the context indicates otherwise, in keeping with the literary conventions governing the original translations from Arabic and Persian into English.

internalizing moral principles as personal values that express one's own nobility, and then using wisdom to apply them to real-life situations—not only contributes to one's own intellectual and spiritual growth but also to the transformation of society. The human being's innate potential nobility is actualized when she makes a deliberate and conscious commitment to exhibit wise speech and wise actions, primarily through interacting with and caring for others.

Betts-Razavi and Mahmoudi, writing in the concept of peace education, effectively summarize these principles: "Every human being possesses the capacity to reflect spiritual qualities. . . . [N]obility belongs to every human soul as a latent potential and this human potential finds expression in a two-pronged moral purpose – personal spiritual development and the betterment of the world" (230).

The essentially spiritual view of the human being does not mean that the Bahá'í Faith denies the importance of intellectual education, or sees moral education as the only important kind. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that

> Man has two powers; and his development, two aspects. One power is connected with the material world, and by it he is capable of material advancement. The other power is spiritual, and through its development his inner, potential nature is awakened. These powers are like two wings. Both must be developed, for flight is impossible with one wing. Praise be to God! Material advancement has been evident in the world, but there is need of spiritual advancement in like proportion. (*Promulgation* 60)

Therefore, from the point of view of Bahá'í beliefs, if humanity is to advance toward the nobility of its station, the co-development of both the material powers and the spiritual nature within must be nurtured. The balance implied by the metaphor of the two wings suggests a connection to the concept of wisdom developed above. Moral/spiritual precepts cannot be applied as abstract truths that simply override material considerations; they must be applied rigorously but contextually, in a manner that balances faithful adherence to moral truth with creative application to practical circumstances.

The Bahá'í concepts of human nobility and wisdom can be correlated to some of the concepts found in the literature on moral education. The Bahá'í desire to foster nobility in student behavior aligns with the general educational concern with prosocial behavior patterns; when schools aspire to promote moral values and a knowledge of social practices that respect the rights of all people and that value human diversity (Kidron and Fleischman 7; Freitas et al. 3), they are arguably affirming that students have the capacity to both express their own nobility and honor the inherent nobility of others. The goal of moral education for both educational theorists and Bahá'í

educators can be expressed in similar terms: to equip youth with the capabilities to live their lives well and serve their communities effectively. More practically, educational theorists and Bahá'í educators have a compatible understanding of the process of developing prosocial behavior, wisdom and nobility: these are viewed as dispositions and capabilities that are developed over time and through action when the educational environment deliberately fosters students' innate potential. While there is thus overlap between both goals and process between the two approaches to moral education, Bahá'í educators situate their endeavors within a larger context. For Bahá'ís, moral education is not necessitated merely by the need to prevent social disfunction. It rests on the recognition of human beings as spiritual beings who have a two-fold moral purpose: that of developing their latent spiritual and intellectual potentialities and contributing to the well-being of the entire society. Thus, both the self-actualization of the individual and the realization of the purpose of human society as a whole depend upon moral education.

The Case Study

Having presented the conceptual background that informs the case study, we now turn to the study itself. We begin with a description of the Nancy Campbell Academy, enumerate the nineteen moral capabilities that are at the center of its approach to moral education, and briefly considering how these capabilities correlate to the concept of wisdom in the literature canvassed above. We then outline the methods used to generate the case study, before turning to the central question of this paper: how does NCA's approach to moral education work in practice, and what are its impacts? This exploration is by way of a narrative, based on the first author's embedded observations at NCA.

The Nancy Campbell Academy

Nancy Campbell Academy is an independent, Bahá'í-inspired school. It accepts students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. At the time of the observer's engagement with the school, the approximately one hundred enrolled students were from China, Kuwait, Arabia, Canada, Mexico and the United States. Roughly fifty percent of the students were Bahá'ís. As part of the enrolment process, which includes an interview, all students were recorded as having explicitly expressed a desire to be at NCA. Approximately ninety percent of NCA staff were Bahá'ís, including teachers, administrators and service staff.

NCA's educational mission, reflected in its promotional materials and expressed by leadership and staff during interviews, is to provide a foundational education aimed at helping students achieve academic excellence within a clear moral framework. Together these goals reflect the school's commitment to both intellectual development and ethical/moral growth as essential dimensions of a well-rounded education. NCA further describes its

mission as being to prepare for admission to university students who are oriented towards unity in diversity and are committed to contributing to it as tomorrow's leaders. The school's focus on moral education as an integral component of education overall is evident in how it presents its mission; its brochure, for instance, states as a fundamental premise the fact that educational efforts should not be solely directed towards students' intellectual development and training, but must also include the infusion of moral values, cultivating student nobility and fostering wisdom.

NCA's curriculum is based on the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum. Additionally, it purposefully includes the overarching concept of world citizenship "as part of everyday life" ("Nancy Campbell Academy").

The Nineteen Moral Capabilities

At the core of NCA's approach to moral education is a set of nineteen moral capabilities that not only guide the curriculum but inform the daily interactions between members of the school community as well as their spiritual lifeworld.

These capabilities interweave moral concepts with individual attitudes, virtues and skills. One criteria behind the selection of the capabilities is that each should be observable in staff and student behavior. Thus, members of the NCA community strive to develop the capability to:

1. Evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses without involving ego.
2. Transcend their lower passions by focusing on higher purposes and capabilities.
3. Manage their affairs and responsibilities with rectitude of conduct based on moral and ethical principles.
4. Learn from systematic reflection upon action within a consistent framework.
5. Perceive and interpret the significance of current events and trends considering an appropriate historical perspective.
6. Think systematically and strategically in the search for solutions.
7. Form a common vision of a desirable future based on shared values and principles, and articulate this in a way that inspires them to work towards its realization.
8. Imbue their actions and thoughts with love.
9. Encourage others and bring happiness into their hearts.
10. Take initiative in a creative and disciplined way.
11. Sustain effort, persevering and overcoming obstacles.
12. Participate effectively in consultation.
13. Build Unity in Diversity.
14. Commit themselves to empowering educational activities as both students and teachers.
15. Recognize relationships of domination and contribute to

transformation into relationships based on interconnectedness, reciprocity and cooperation.

16. Contribute to the establishment of justice.

17 Serve in societal institutions to facilitate the expression of the talents of others that are affected by these institutions.

18. Be a responsible and loving family member as a child or spouse or parent.

19. Cultivate and create a sense of beauty in every endeavor.

These moral capabilities align with elements of wisdom that emerged in the literature review. For example, the capability to evaluate one's strengths and weaknesses without ego resonates with Sternberg's concept of weakening ego-centeredness, enabling balanced and reflective decision-making for the common good ("Why Schools Should Teach for Wisdom" 235). The capabilities of serving societal institutions and being a responsible family member demonstrate the practical application of wisdom to create harmony and facilitate the growth of others, as highlighted by Sternberg's balanced approach to living ethically in the world ("Wisdom" 127). Furthermore, Sternberg's idea of balancing individual, communal, and global interests to work toward a greater good corresponds to the capability of forming and articulating a common vision.

The capability of learning from systematic reflection mirrors Kristjánsson's concept of practical wisdom (phronesis), where thoughtful deliberation on past experiences leads to morally sound actions (1–8). The capability of perceiving current trends within an historical perspective, combined with capabilities pertaining to group decision making in service to the common good (for instance, numbers 7, 12, and 13) reflects Pascual-Leone's assertion that integrating life experiences and cultural context enhances wisdom and enables holistic problem-solving while prioritizing the wellbeing of others (272).

Many of the capabilities can be seen as advancing one or both of the two elements of wisdom identified by Zhang et al.: altruism, and creative problem-solving behavior (15030). We can highlight just three examples. The capability of transcending lower passions by focusing on higher purposes is definitionally connected to altruism in a Bahá'í context, since lower passions are the desires of the egotistical self, while the higher purposes that the Bahá'í teachings direct the human being towards are those concerned with the common good. The capabilities of creative and disciplined initiative and persevering through obstacles are crucial to the behavioral element of wisdom. And the capability of managing responsibilities with moral principles reflects the integration of virtue and knowledge emphasized by Zheng et al.

Notably, Staudinger's emphasis on applying collective knowledge insightfully to complex challenges highlights the capability of thinking systematically and strategically in the search

for solutions. Lastly, the capabilities of imbuing actions with love and bringing happiness to others echo Nabobo's conception of wisdom as fostering balance, hope, and identity affirmation.

It was a point of interest to discover during the interviews in this study that NCA leaders and staff had an operational understanding of wisdom, and how the moral capabilities contributed to its development, that was very much in line with the understanding that emerges from the literature. As just one example, the school leadership shared an understanding of wisdom as comprising two components: first, "purity of motive," and second, the ability to produce "beauty in [one's] life." This echoes the conception of wisdom as rooted in an inner disposition of altruism and finding outward expression in behaviors that are practically and morally suited to circumstances. The concept of "beauty" captures this second element on an intuitive level: the judgment that an act or outcome is beautiful is the aesthetic equivalent of the analytical judgment of the act as suitable, or the moral judgment of the act as correct.

Methodology

The first author and observer-narrator is both a member of the Bahá'í Faith and an educator with diverse international experiences of schools and education systems. The author's personal values, commitments and experiences naturally influence the recorded observations, particularly of wisdom education in Bahá'í schools. Due to their shared world view as both educators and as members of the Bahá'í Faith, familiarity, trust, and inclusive belongingness were quickly established between the observer and school staff. Genuine participant/observer relationships were developed with the NCA leadership, staff and students, making it possible for all involved to potentially evaluate and change their thinking during the process.

The observer reached out to the school founder one year prior to the beginning of the project, and began a conversation to seek consent to observe the daily life of the school.

The overall approach taken to conducting the case study was comparable to a focused ethnography (Wall). The main tools for generating the narrative were non-participant observations and a reflective journal that were informed by the reading of key documents and interviews with key stakeholders. The observation focused on teaching and learning interactions, as well as informal social interaction and relationships between staff, students and parents. The initial telling of this narrative by the first author was to the second author, also an educator. The final re-telling in this article is a joint re-construction, intended primarily, but not exclusively, to inform an audience of Bahá'í educators, both formal (teachers) and informal (parents, and anyone who interacts with young people).

The narrator's daily immersion in the life of the school, including participation in daily activities and social intercourse, enabled both planned and

opportunistic observations. A "fly on the wall" technique was adopted to record activities and interactions as they occurred. Time was spent with students in the dormitories and with the students and staff in the school cafeteria. Thus, information was gained about students' and staff's day-to-day activities and interactions. Observations were also conducted during staff meetings and student behavior management consultations, in formal classes, assemblies and cultural events, and while accompanying the founder to several public speaking events. Interview questions each day were generated from recorded reflections on the previous day's participation, observations and reflections. While each interview thus did not always contain the same questions, all questions were focused in one way or another on gaining insight into the following:

- Why and how did the school foster students' noble and wise decisions and actions?
- What were informants' perceptions of what constituted wisdom and how it is acquired?
- Whose responsibility was it to foster the development of wisdom?

The interviews sought to uncover specific details about curriculum content and about individuals' experiences of educational and social processes used to enhance students' capacity to express their innate nobility, to engage in moral reasoning, and to exercise wisdom.

A total of fifty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted with questions that were relevant to each individual and their place in the school. Interviewees included the founder and the senior leadership (Principal and Vice Principal), sixteen teachers, and five service and administrative staff (a member of the kitchen staff, two administrators, one communication staff and one counsellor). The decision to include all staff, rather than just teaching staff, was based on the school's commitment to the moral concept of unity in diversity, which entails that the views and actions of all members of the institution are valued and respected. Students were randomly selected for interviews, taking gender balance into consideration; one boy and one girl from each grade from 7 to 13 were chosen, for a total of fourteen student interviewees. Some interviews were repeated, to further explore issues that needed clarification. Interviews with former students and staff were opportunistic and dependent on their attendance at the school, their availability and their willingness to be interviewed.

Key documents were also analyzed: the curriculum, in particular an overview of subjects taught in citizenship classes; the "Nineteen Moral Capabilities" (MCs) constituting the foundational principles of the school; and the school's philosophical values (Naylor). These documents were analyzed before and during the interview and observation processes to gain a deeper understanding of the school's philosophy. The analysis highlighted

moral education issues and questions for interviews and consultation.

The Narrative: The Nineteen Moral Capabilities in Practice

Of course, many organizations articulate lofty principles but fail to develop the culture, processes, or structures that permit them to be realized. The following narrative, based on the first author's observations, describes how the nineteen moral capabilities were in fact evident as actionable pathways to facilitate wisdom at NCA. This narrative highlights the role of education in nurturing individuals' capabilities to contribute to a better world.

The narrative begins with salient observations from interviews that demonstrate how NCA community members themselves see the nineteen moral capabilities operating, followed by the complementary findings from the first author's own observations of interactions at NCA.

Founder

We begin with insights from NCA's founder, Gordon Naylor. These are presented at some length since they provide insight into the core values and beliefs that underpin the school's philosophy and practices; in other words, Naylor articulates the aspirations that generated the nineteen moral capabilities, while subsequent interviews and observations permit us to consider how these aspirations are being realized in practice.

Naylor's description of his vision for the school highlights a number of complementary, interwoven aspirations. At the core is the importance of unity amongst a diverse student body: *"*We hold Unity in Diversity as watchwords for our school. Our students come from all over the world, and we value the diverse experiences that they have had." This is paired with an equally strong commitment to academic excellence: "We promote achieving academic excellence through a curriculum that provides students with an optimal learning environment geared to helping them develop their full academic potential." But this vision—academic excellence within a harmonious school environment—is incomplete without a third component: teaching students to serve others and their communities. Naylor, drawing on the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, argues that it is no longer enough to follow the golden rule, to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"; it is better to prefer others to yourself,[5] because this will have a direct impact on the quality of service you render. He states that service is an important component of wisdom, describing the act of service as an opportunity to create an environment for the students and staff to put the nineteen moral capabilities into practice. Indeed, a disposition to serve can be the catalyst for developing wisdom. When individuals have a disposition to serve,

5 See, Bahá'u'lláh, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih 10:2.

> Even if they don't have all the knowledge components, it begins a dynamic of growth, which provokes a thirst for knowledge, a thirst for skill, a thirst for how to better be able to serve and with it comes joy and happiness which benefits others.

Naylor refers to this process as resulting in "true glory for human beings." He expresses the conviction that individuals feel fulfilled when they are of service to other people, noting that "Their sense of fulfilment is greater depending on the level of selflessness." In this context wisdom can be understood as embodying "absolute selflessness—to be able to look after the best interest of another person and that this has a direct impact on the quality of service which would become one of self-sacrifice and self-effacement."

Naylor's conception of wisdom is rooted in a recognition that the greatest source of wisdom is God. He further suggests that this recognition will make one "other-focused" and concerned with action, reflection and consultation on individual and collective development.

This vision—in which wisdom is cultivated in the context of an orientation towards service—is a laudable and lofty educational aim. The natural question, of course, is: How does NCA facilitate the acquisition of such wisdom and sense of service amongst its students? Naylor describes the following action-oriented strategic elements that were employed as deliberate pedagogies to provide a platform to achieve the school's vision and to ensure that the daily lived experience of students and staff was consciously aligned with that vision:

- Promoting spiritual awareness in the school environment.
- Upholding the principle of unity in diversity.
- Holding workshops to orient both staff and students to the nineteen moral capabilities, focused on how to translate them into personalized language (see below) and implement them in daily life.
- Employing the technique of consultation (see "The Process of Consultation" section).
- Developing mentorship relationships.
- Using dance and theatre workshops to enhance social, moral, and spiritual understandings
- Using morning assemblies as a "communal experience" to reaffirm and strengthen the oneness of the school community.

Despite Naylor's emphasis on the importance of the moral capabilities,

he cautions that it is important not to be too direct about them as the students might develop an aversion to them. Instead, staff members are expected to provide activities designed for students to gain experiential knowledge of the moral capabilities. Importantly, he explains that staff should be exemplary models of moral and wise behavior. Staff are expected to provide students with feedback that identifies and applauds students' noble and wise choices and actions as they occur (MC no. 14). This expectation illustrates NCA's commitment to help students become aware of their emerging capabilities and strengths. The curriculum includes World Citizenship units of study that incorporate the nineteen MCs into the learning outcomes.

Leaders

The school leadership (Principal and Vice Principal) describe how the nineteen moral capabilities operate in practice. As part of their own commitment to the school's vision, the leadership promotes the expectation that all staff and students will draw on all the nineteen capabilities to develop the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge to help transform themselves and contribute to the moral, intellectual and social progress of their communities (MC no. 7).

This expectation is supported by a key strategy designed to make the nineteen moral capabilities real to students, and to give them a grounded and personalized understanding of their everyday implications. At the beginning of the school year, students are asked to rewrite the moral capabilities in "youth talk"—that is, to express them in their own words and in ways that enable other youth to understand their meaning. Students engage in small groups, each focusing on one moral capability, rewriting it in language that expresses their personal understanding in terms of the attitudes, virtues and skills required for its implementation.

The leadership also takes concrete steps to help NCA teachers incorporate the capabilities into their work. The principal's own experience with the moral capabilities dates to her time as an NCA teacher; she recalls her joy in coming to know about them, and explains how she designed and incorporated them into every English, history, and world citizenship class she taught. Now, as a school leader, she continues to use staff meetings to encourage and assist teachers to put them into practice within each disciplinary curriculum. She notes that it is important to guide and support staff to develop teaching capabilities to achieve this institutional intent. She gives the example of encouraging staff to work out what it might look like to apply the capabilities in a calculus class, or how a physics teacher might challenge his class to prove the existence or non-existence of God through physics, causing the students to examine everything from an ethical and moral perspective. The principal highlights how science, which can be viewed as concerned

only with facts about the natural world and therefore not concerned with morality, can be taught in a way that helps students develop wisdom through the consideration of ethical issues. The principal expands on this by describing a lesson in which a hypothetical situation was put to the students relating to the genetic modification of human beings, which provided an opportunity to raise moral questions around whether the possibility of doing something is sufficient reason for attempting it: "Can you do whatever you like?" While apparently simple, this question is an important starting point for helping students think about the role of science and technology in the project of bettering the world. The school leadership unanimously emphasizes that facilitating students' wisdom requires educators who share a united vision—one that recognizes students as "noble beings" who uphold "a moral responsibility for truth," who are "developing their capacity to serve, while holding a vision of 'embracing a world' with all its limitations."

In the experience of the leadership, acquiring the nineteen capabilities is ultimately transformative for students; it "create[s] a real shift in a student's mental framework." By encouraging learners to see themselves as noble beings and to recognize the interconnectedness of all things, the nineteen moral capabilities support a holistic approach to education, one that fosters ethical inquiry, moral reasoning and a deeper understanding of the world across all subjects.

Teaching Staff

The NCA teachers provide rich insight into how the quality of their communication with students is crucial to the efficacy of the nineteen moral capabilities. One teacher's words effectively summarize the emphasis they all placed on the role of positive encouragement: "it is really important in a classroom setting for a teacher to be really, really positive and appreciate all the steps that children take towards wisdom."

Teachers explain that encouraging feedback in the classrooms supports students' acquisition of knowledge, and helps them as they develop the capacity to both learn from others and to think for themselves, always drawing inspiration from the nineteen capabilities. As one teacher puts it, wisdom can be gained by "asking questions of ourselves, of our peers and also of our mentors." They describe a goal of guiding students to develop the confidence to believe in their own strength to question, analyze and develop solutions.

One teacher describes the example of an English class in which students carried out a character analysis of the title character in Shakespear's *Hamlet* through the lens of the nineteen moral capabilities, with a particular focus on the first: the moral capability of evaluating one's own strengths and weaknesses without involving ego. By applying the moral capabilities to Hamlet, and assessing which ones stood to be strengthened in the character, they practiced the wisdom that

comes from applying moral reasoning. As the teacher puts it:

> They [students] need to realize that they can figure these things out, come up with things they had never thought about before and, therefore, they (learn) they are smart, and they are wise.

The teachers express a belief that their actions as teachers who use the nineteen moral capabilities framework are contributing to raising up "a generation of wise children and people who are interested in increasing their wisdom." By referencing the capabilities at appropriate moment, they feel they are helping students become aware of, and more likely to use, the moral guidelines.

Students

The NCA students interviewed in this study provide evidence that the aspirations of the school's founder, leadership, and teachers with respect to the moral capabilities are being met.

First, they refer positively to the structure and discipline of the school, and affirm that the capabilities are incorporated in each class and the whole school environment. A common remark from the students was that the moral capabilities are incorporated into every class, "even Math class." They recognize that the capabilities extend beyond the substantive curriculum into the processes and habits they develop. One student shares the example of how the nineteen moral capabilities create a sense of responsibility in students, encouraged by their teachers, to take proper notes in class and to complete the required work for each lesson.

Second, the students express that the clarity of the moral framework and its incorporation into all aspects of school life do, in fact, help them to understand wisdom. As one student puts it: "Here you focus on the moral character, you have guidelines to do that; it is sort of like a parenting school . . . [the teachers] are like our parents for a while, like in classes we have many moral things that the teachers bring to us." Students feel strongly that their understanding and application of the MCs generates the behavior, attitudes and skills needed to be a wise person. One student explains that "the whole idea of NCA is about bringing wisdom to young people and showing them the moral capabilities."

Administrative and Service Staff

It might seem natural to assume that, as an essentially pedagogical device, the nineteen moral capabilities would be relevant only within the teacher-student relationship. This is not the case; consistent with NCA's vision of itself as a whole community, the capabilities permeated all roles and relationships. I was struck by the degree to which the service and administrative staff took to heart the importance of personally modelling them as part of NCA's project of helping students to learn their everyday application. One of the administrative staff indicates that he

deliberately implements them, for instance by loving where he is and the people that he works with and by creating an environment that is beautiful. The communication director indicates that he implements the moral capability about "managing one's responsibilities with rectitude of conduct that is based on moral and ethical principles" by striving "to be truly honest." He explains that honesty is critically important when he communicates with parents regarding the school's vision and intent.

Observer's Reflections on NCA's Practices

What follows are some reflections on the extent to which what was shared by the leaders, staff, and students aligns with the observations of the first author during her time at NCA. This section emphasizes ways in which the school integrates the nineteen moral capabilities into daily practice, leading to distinctive features that set it apart from other educational institutions.

Orienting Staff and Students to the School's Vision

During the first author's time at NCA—sitting in classroom sessions, attending morning assemblies, living in the dorm, observing extra-curricular activities, and having informal chats—she observed NCA leadership's significant investment of time and focus into professional learning for staff. This reflected a recognition that to achieve their vision of fostering students' innate potential for wisdom and nobility, they needed to ensure that staff had a clear understanding of what fostering nobility and wisdom might look like in practice. As such, teachers were given spaces to learn, reflect, and consult about how to actively enrich the learning environment by incorporating strategies that enact the nineteen moral capabilities within the curriculum.

Staff meetings served as a key mechanism to ensure teachers' understanding of the core expectations of their roles and responsibilities within the school. They were thus a vital setting to reinforce the embedding of the nineteen moral capabilities.

In the first author's observation, these training spaces were themselves profoundly coherent with the moral capabilities. For instance, the point was not to train teachers to be, or pretend to be, perfect: the first author observed that during the staff development programs, teachers were encouraged to see themselves as learners, openly acknowledging mistakes in front of students. As one teacher put it:

> When we practice the nineteen moral capabilities, or when we have workshops for the teachers and the staff, one of the things that staff are encouraged to do is to admit to their students when they make a mistake.

In our view, this element of NCA's culture strongly reflects MCs 14 ("Commit themselves to empowering

educational activities as both students and teachers") and 15 ("Recognize relationships of domination and contribute to transformation into relationships based on interconnectedness, reciprocity and cooperation"), since teachers' willingness to admit when they are wrong can both empower students and prevent the tendency of the teacher-student relationship to privilege the teacher as one who knows, and diminish the student as one who does not know.

Another space that was observed to play a central role in the deliberate cultivation of the nineteen moral capabilities was the morning assembly. The first author was present at almost all morning assemblies during the ethnographic study and was invited to actively participate by reciting a prayer. The morning assembly provided an environment in which all participants could focus on higher purposes and capabilities (MC no. 2). This was a structured setting, in which an "initiator"—typically a staff member, but sometimes a student—would begin an exchange, with other community members then engaging with the initial contribution. This fostered honest engagement and respectful interaction, creating a dynamic and trusting relationship between the initiator, the reactor and responder. Such trust and positivity were seen to contribute to students' confidence in considering new other initiatives they might pursue. As with other deliberately included actions and interactions by staff and leadership, the morning assemblies functioned as a communal experience, where students and staff affirmed each other and reinforced the oneness of the school and its community.

Building Unity in Diversity

Consistent with MC no. 13, unity in diversity was consistently emphasized and promoted in the observed assemblies, classroom interactions, dance workshops, performances, etc. On the one hand, this occurred in explicit ways. For instance, teachers encouraged students to share cultural traditions and perspectives, reinforcing belonging across differences of nationality and faith as a positive contribution to global society. Staff responses during interviews confirmed that this practice was deliberate: they spoke of raising students' awareness of diversity as a strong means for promoting unity in a way that is conducive to happiness. "They [the students] 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" (MC no. 13). Student responses confirmed that the school environment did, in fact, generate a sense of unity in diversity. Asone student remarked: "despite what difference you have in religion, it's all one. It's considered one here so really no one's [religion is] better than the other."

On the other hand, the ethos of unity in diversity infused many other facets of the teacher-student relationship. It was evident for example in teachers' care not to use any social pressure to push students to change their

personal beliefs or opinions on any matter. Teachers again confirmed that this was a deliberate approach, based on an understanding that "everyone is searching for truth"; not only will students not arrive at truth through indoctrination, but the diversity of perspectives in the student body is a valuable resource, allowing each to learn from others as they freely investigate reality.

The effort to promote unity in diversity was not undertaken by the teachers alone. Students were observed to take ownership of this moral capability; through deliberate actions aimed at building unity in diversity and encouraging their peers, students actively contributed to creating a positive and joyful environment. In their reflections, students explained that they experienced joy and satisfaction in their interactions when relating to others in a supportive and kind manner, emphasizing the idea that one's happiness is deeply connected to the relationships built with others. These comments, combined with observations of the students, suggest that they saw moral capability 9 (Encourage others and bring happiness into their hearts) as inextricable from building unity in diversity: unity is about more than acknowledging and respecting diversity, it requires building relationships of encouragement, support and kindness across all lines of difference.

Providing Encouraging Feedback to Students on Wise Action (MCs no. 12 and no. 14)

Many of the practices and processes that were observed to contribute to student uptake of the moral capabilities related to how communication was approached very deliberately at NCA. One dimension of this approach involved encouragement. Teachers acted on a shared conviction (attested in their interviews) that supportive encouragement was crucial to students' implementation of the nineteen moral capabilities.

Encouragement was of at least two kinds. In class, teachers were observed to frequently pause to affirm students' strengths, explicitly linking feedback to moral capabilities such as reflection and accountability. This kind of "retrospective encouragement" was complemented by "prospective encouragement," in which teachers used encouragement to elicit student reflection, expressing confidence that they had the capacity to think things through in a wise way. This was most clearly observed in the context of NCA's world citizenship curriculum, which provided a direct opportunity for students to develop their ability to reflect on their actions. For example, in a geography class, students were asked to consider and contrast the moral implications of using products from a factory that employed child labor or from one that relied on forced labor. Rather than steering students toward a "right answer," teachers encouraged them to

reflect on their own reasoning process, creating space to critically examine the ethical implications of everyday choices and reinforcing the importance of aligning personal decisions with values that promote justice and social responsibility. The result of this approach was that students gained more than an understanding of whether something in the abstract was right and wrong; they learned that they themselves had the capacity to apply moral reasoning to the world around them. They learned that they had wisdom.

Fostering Consultation

Another key element of the deliberate approach to communication at NCA was the priority given to consultation (itself one of the MCs), understood as a collective approach to truth seeking through the exchange of ideas, rooted in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. In consultation, participants are encouraged to share their views with complete honesty, paired with courtesy, and then to treat their contribution as the property of the group rather than a personal position to be championed. The staff described being deliberate about efforts to enhance students' understanding of the concept of consultation, and this matched observations: the practice of consultation was consistently evident across a wide range of school activities, from staff meetings and student council sessions, to planning sessions prior to dance workshops and performances.

Even behavior management meetings were an opportunity to practice consultation. During one such session, a student was respectfully invited to explore the issue of punctuality in the spirit of consultation. Rather than a disciplinary approach that might make a student defensive and limit his ownership of the issue, this consultative environment helped the student reflect honestly on his responsibility and ultimately reach the decision to set an alarm, ensuring he would arrive at school on time. It was observed in this and other examples that consultation helped students gain a clearer understanding of their own attitudes and choices, and how they learned and led.

Consultation is not only applied to the classroom or to issues confronting students; it informs the approach to self-reflection at the level of the school itself. Feedback at NCA is much more than a one-way process. The school places high importance on students' opinions of the curriculum, the learning processes and social interactions. This is in keeping with the spirit of consultation. There is no assumption that only some members of the community have insights or ideas about how to improve the school; everyone is encouraged to share their perspective. Explicit changes have been made to the program as a result of students' suggestions. The school's response to students' feedback goes a long way to impress on students that their considered opinion is valued and agentic. They experience their education environment as an ongoing work in progress based on staff and student consultation and reflection.

Working towards a Common Vision

Consultation was observed to be integral to the pursuit of another of the moral capabilities: the capability to articulate a common vision for a desirable future based on shared values and principles. This capability acknowledges that capable leaders are those who can articulate a vision and in doing so inspire others to work towards its realization. At NCA this was not limited to a single overarching vision for the school, but was applied in both formal and everyday contexts. For example, students practiced this capability through creative dance and theatre workshops, service projects, oral English classes where they delivered speeches, and through consultation in group projects and extracurricular activities. In these settings, students were encouraged to stand and speak about issues at the heart of social needs—envisioning a world free of racism, inequality, or other forms of injustice. They were also guided to consult with peers—finding out what others hope to achieve, and then articulating a shared vision that reflected collective values. The feedback they received helped them refine whether they had expressed the vision clearly.

From a purely academic perspective, NCA has a strong track record of high achieving students obtaining university scholarships, and taking advanced placement exams to gain university level credits. However, while academic success was naturally strongly emphasized in the school, students were encouraged to become capable leaders who can articulate a vision that goes beyond their own personal success—a vision "which people desire and feel is true," as Naylor put it. This perspective aligns with the Bahá'í understanding that the "honour and distinction of the individual" does not consist in becoming solely the best physician, architect or plumber, but rather is generated by applying knowledge and skills learned for the "social good" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 2). In keeping with the Bahá'í approach to social change, working towards the social good is framed at NCA as a collaborative project, not something that a person does on someone else's behalf guided only by their own ideas and priorities. Hence, in matters large and small, from group projects to extra-curricular activities, students were 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 (MC no. 7).

Students were observed to be doing exactly this—frequently checking in with each other to ensure that, in whatever they were jointly engaged in, they had a common understanding of the goal being pursued, a vision towards which they were working. These conversations, however quick and informal, naturally drew on the

skills of consultation. In their own reflections during interviews, students clarified that they saw staff, students, and the school curriculum all working together to form a common vision for the school. They reiterated that, "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." They also understood the work of developing a common vision as being fundamentally collaborative, with others' insights and strengths being a resource: "if there are many people around you who are wise, because I find that many of the teachers at [NCA] 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."

It was also observed that students took seriously their responsibility to inspire others—whether through routine interactions such as group consultations, or in performances deliberately designed to inspire, such as creative dance and theatre workshops or speeches. Reflecting on their participation in these kinds of activities, students were able to articulate a sense of responsibility to something greater than their own selves.

Learning to Be of Service by Being of Service

It was observed that service to the community is regarded as a significant strategy within the school's approach to moral capability development. Mtawa and Nkhoma point out that service-learning functions as an educational pedagogy for advancing citizenship, conscientization and civic agency and as a capability practice for developing global citizens. They argue for an expansive pedagogical model that enriches life through a capability approach, in which service-learning "moves beyond skills to cultivate critical consciousness, civic agency and citizenship" (112). In alignment with this perspective, school leaders emphasized their commitment to raising the standard of moral leadership through service.

> 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 (MCs no. 2, no. 16, and no. 17).

Students were observed to "learn by doing" when it came to being of service. They explained that through creative dance and theatre workshops, which is the practical component of the compulsory world citizenship classes, they were not only performing but also raising social, moral, and spiritual awareness among themselves and their audiences. In one case, when invited to another school to address racism, students consulted on how best to intervene, deciding first to model unity in their own attitudes and then designing games, performances, and discussions

that encouraged reflection without preaching. They described these workshops as "an amazing experience," noting how participation transformed their own understanding and growth:

> . . . 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.

Students emphasized that service—whether through workshops, the fifty compulsory hours of annual service, or community projects—gave them not only "a chance to serve the world" and help society, but also opportunities to grow as a person, "to change [one's] personality." In this way they recognized that true fulfillment comes from selfless service.

Conclusion

Articulating the motivation behind many efforts to learn about wisdom education, Sternberg 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*" (2004167). Reflecting on the problems that face global citizens, Laszlo similarly insists that it is not "the world" that is the cause of our problems, but rather the "human beings" who inhabit it (25–26). These insights underscore the urgent need for education to develop students' attitudes and values as well as their skills and knowledge, so that future leaders will understand humanity's interconnectedness and become champions of justice and builders of unity. This imperative calls for a deliberate approach to moral education, one that recognizes—as Bahá'u'lláh affirms, that each human being is a "mine rich in gems of inestimable value" ("Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd"). The process of drawing forth these inner virtues requires intentionality, structure, and a shared vision of what matters most. Thus, we should expect Bahá'í-inspired schools to provide a comprehensive educational experience—comprising material, intellectual, social, and spiritual education— that recognizes the noble potential within each student, seeks to cultivate their spiritual qualities, and works to foster the wisdom required to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.

NCA exemplifies this deliberate approach. As this focused ethnography has illustrated, the school has intentionally designed its moral curriculum and pedagogy to include principles that the scholarly literature would recognize as "wisdom education," based on a moral and social vision that affirms the innate goodness of human beings. NCA's nineteen moral capabilities framework is consciously woven into the structures and practices of the school.

As explored above, this deliberate approach begins with the leadership's communicating its vision, and implementing practices that nurture a learning environment that views students as innately noble and that fosters wisdom. Teachers' understanding of their own moral capabilities is regarded as critical

if they are to align their teaching strategies and course content with the nineteen moral capabilities framework, and this is reflected in the deliberate approach to orienting teachers on an ongoing basis to the framework. School spaces are designed to help students actively engaged with the framework on their own terms, such as through the "youth talk" strategy. Communication practices that are coherent with the framework are deliberately cultivated: teachers are expected to provide detailed feedback to students when they are observed to make wise choices that focus on the interests of others, and students are given the opportunity to use consultation with their teachers and peers as both a way to generate shared understanding, and a tool to work through any social or learning challenges. Students are guided to see diversity as a source of strength, to build unity across difference, and to find happiness and joy in doing so. In all these ways, wisdom is nurtured through practice at NCA. The central value of the moral capabilities framework at NCA enables a shared understanding among the leadership, staff and students about what matters most, and with it a shared aspiration for moral excellence that does not begin and end with words. In the first author's time at NCA, she observed students who viewed themselves and others as noble beings working to cultivate spiritual qualities, and who had a profound understanding of their place in a global society, and their responsibility to promote the advantage of the whole.

In short, the school's approach does appear to help students cultivate the attributes and qualities that the scholarly literature identifies as "wisdom". Specifically, the students were observed to both adopt an altruistic orientation towards their school community and the wider world, and to practice applying moral reasoning to practical situations.

This article aimed to take up the challenge articulated by Sona Farid-Arbab, and draw on both theory and practice to contribute to the ongoing work of articulating a common vision of a Bahá'í-inspired education. We have identified aspirations and practices at NCA that were observed to be distinctive, deliberate, explicit and worthy of further discussion. We do not doubt the genuineness of the aspirations of all those involved in shaping this school, which they unashamedly understand to be a work-in-progress that is nurtured over time by all its members. The school's leader, Gordon Naylor, has welcomed this exploration and interpretation of the school's values and practices, and willingly offer's NCA's example as a contribution to the the evolving conception of a Bahá'í-inspired education. We suggest that a positive next step would be to follow up with a selection of NCA graduates to explore the long-term impact of NCA's education on them and their life trajectory. Such research could contribute to building an evidence-based framework for Bahá'í-inspired education.[6]

6 The authors wish to express their gratitude to the founder of Nancy Campbell

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