From the Editor's Desk

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At least as early as high school, I recognized an uncomfortable dichotomy in my understanding of education, and in the way the educational system presented itself. On the one hand, I could *feel* that my education, at its best, was eliciting something from me, drawing out and developing my mind, expanding my thoughts and broadening my perspectives. On the other hand, I was periodically confronted with a set of perfectly valid practical questions—What will you do when you grow up? What do you need to learn to get a job?—that, taken to their logical extension, seemed to want to flatten all of my lofty ideas about education to a single, purely instrumental concern: *How will this ultimately help me earn a living*?

It would be some years before I found the language, through participation in courses of the Ruhi Institute, to consider the extent to which the societal discourse on education was *fragmented*, and how this fragmentation was reproduced in my own thinking. Reintegrating fragmented ideas, of course, does not mean taking them all as equally valid or fundamental. While educating oneself in order to be able to do valuable work, including in a career, is indispensable, Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the more fundamental purpose, and power, of education:

> Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 161–162)

A cursory glance at how the world has changed since Bahá'u'lláh penned the above words reveals that more people than ever before in human history have access to the great bounty of education. Yet do we feel confident that our education systems are allowing us access to the full richness of that which we inherently possess? Are they causing us, and our children, to reveal our treasures, and enabling mankind to benefit therefrom? What ultimately is a "proper" education—an education that enables you to become what you truly are?

In this issue, we are pleased to present three articles that help us consider this complex question.

In *Bahá'í-Inspired Education Endeavors and Social Justice*, Ilya

Shodjaee-Zrudlo and Ashraf Rushdy highlight the shared understanding of the Bahá'í community and of the social justice education tradition that a proper education must concern itself with values, not just facts, and must aim at justice as indispensable to advancing the wellbeing of humankind. Social justice education has inherited some of the genuine moral achievements of the broader discourse on justice: a sharpened sense of human dignity, an insistence on equality, and an awareness and critique of structural oppression. Yet, as the article skillfully diagnoses, certain assumptions within the tradition undermine its own aims. Authority tends to be treated as inherently oppressive, which can undermine the indispensable role of the teacher. The passion for equality can slide into resentment and entitlement. Awareness of how various identities have been structurally marginalized can harden into a fixed insistence on identarian incommensurability and competition. In articulating how the Bahá'í teachings and the community's experience with education might point to resolutions, the authors present a clear and compelling way forward, informed by the Bahá'í Teachings and the community's experience with education, rooted in the conviction that love and justice are not competing moral demands, and that only when social justice education draws on love's "power to transform the world" will it live up to its highest aspirations (Universal House of Justice, 22 July 2020).

Ymasumac Marañón Davis and Justin Scoggin extend the conversation of how the Bahá'í experience can inform education in *Expanding on a Bahá'í-Inspired Pedagogy of Social Transformation*. Drawing on their experience as both educators and academics, and with practical experience in both the Bahá'í-inspired Wilmette Institute and in mainstream education, the authors are well-placed to diagnose the implicit materialism of the worldview animating much of formal higher education in the West. This worldview, which determines what counts as knowledge and what education is ultimately for, has its clearest symptom in a competency-based education that reduces human development to measurable outputs and evaluates behavioural standards rather than nurturing spiritual qualities. Bahá'í-inspired educational initiatives are learning about a different kind of pedagogy, one focused on developing the powers of the soul to serve a twofold moral purpose—the student's own spiritual growth and the transformation of society. Centered on a humble posture of learning, drawing on cycles of action and reflection, situating faculty and students as walking a shared path of learning and service, and emphasizing fieldwork that inserts students as protagonists in communities, this pedagogy serves as a rich and exciting example of how insights from the community-building process are directly relevant to education more broadly.

In *Interdisciplinarity, Connectivity and Capability: An Exploration in the Context of Social Change*, Felicity

Rawlings-Sanaei grapples with a prevalent feature of education, and the generation of knowledge more generally, that is closely tied to materialism: the fragmentation of knowledge into isolated disciplines, mirroring and reinforcing a fragmented perception of reality itself. When knowledge about things is severed from their underlying unity, it blinds itself to relationality; education produces specialists who cannot read the wholeness of social problems, and institutions generate knowledge about communities rather than with them. Interdisciplinarity is a promising response to this problem, but in its current form it remains largely a top-down enterprise of academics; it addresses fragmentation at the level of disciplines but not at the level of participation. Asking what might it mean for the grassroots to contribute to interdisciplinary generation of knowledge, Rawlings-Sanaei argues that a framework of learning in action, familiar to Bahá'ís as the iterative cycle of consultation, action, reflection, and study, can help reframe capability not as expertise but as the developed capacity to read one's social reality, participate in collective inquiry, and act with agency. When knowledge is produced in this way, the artificial separation between the knower and the known, the specialist and the community, begins to dissolve. Interdisciplinarity becomes genuinely transformative only when it is participatory all the way down.

This issue also features two poems by Terry Ofner exploring the long-term results of sacrifice. A similar long view of history is reprised by multidisciplinary artist Masud Olufani's cover art. Masud writes, of this incredibly evocative piece:

> "Days of Future Past" seeks to collapse time by linking the past to the future. The title is derived from a 2014 *X-Men* film of the same name in which the central characters live in a dystopian future as they oscillate between time periods. I have appropriated the phrase in this multimedia work, to illustrate how time is not simply a linear construct, but rather a constantly shifting reality that is lived in the past, the present and the future simultaneously. We are, in part because we were, and we will be, in part, because we are. We are the embodied realities of "timelessness," our spiritual consciousness a corridor that leads us beyond the limitations of fragmented dichotomies, to an integrated and unified understanding of the interconnectedness of all reality.