

## **Course Outline, Book 3**

**Ruhi Book 3: *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 1*** is designed to develop the capabilities needed to conduct children's classes. It is the third in a course sequence designed to raise up human resources capable of fostering the growth of the Baha'i Community with efficiency and love.

*Excerpted from "To the Collaborators":* This book is the collection of three units aimed at helping individuals who wish to undertake the highly meritorious service of teaching regular classes for the spiritual education of children. It is assumed that those who study it have already participated in courses in which at least the content of Book 1 of the Ruhi Institute has been covered.

Baha'is who have taught the Faith in receptive areas will not be surprised to see that the Ruhi Institute places a strong emphasis on children's classes. The insistent desire of newly enrolled believers, especially in rural areas and the outskirts of large cities, for their children to be educated by Baha'i teachers is well-known. Unfortunately, there have never been enough teachers to respond to this well-justified demand, and for some reason or another, many capable Baha'is who could teach children have not attached the necessary importance to this act of service on which the future of new generations depends.

It is important to mention that Baha'i children's classes are not like the classes of indoctrination which are common in many other religions. Even though children are instructed in the principles, teachings and basic beliefs of the Faith, the emphasis is on learning to think, to reflect and to apply spiritual laws to the life of the individual and society. Especially during the early years of childhood, great attention is given to the development of spiritual qualities and to those beliefs, habits and behaviors that constitute the essential attributes of a spiritual being.

The desire to avoid indoctrination or catechism should not, however, lead to laxity in religious instruction. Doctrines that have disregarded religious education for children and have left them to acquire their own standards and beliefs, supposedly by free choice, from their interactions with society, have greatly contributed to the present state of moral disintegration. The proponents of these doctrines do not seem to appreciate the fact that there are political, economic and cultural interests in society which aggressively promote their own desired patterns of thought and behavior. But even in this were not so, there is no reason to suppose that a new generation of children will be able to create a better world without an education which is basically spiritual. Humanity, left to its own devices without divine guidance, has produced nothing more than chaos, injustice and suffering.

Although the dynamics of educating children vary greatly from community to community in the Baha'i world, the importance of the enterprise is a matter on

which all can agree. Moreover, it is evident that the key to success in any ambitious plan for the spiritual education of large numbers of children is the training of teachers. It is hoped that this book will help Baha'i institutions and their agencies, especially regional and national institutes, in their efforts to substantially increase the number of dedicated and well-prepared Baha'i children's class teachers.

## **Unit 1: Some Principles of Baha'i Education**

Purpose: To understand some of the basic principles of Baha'i education of children.

*Excerpted from "To the Collaborators":* The first unit of the book, "Some Principles of Baha'i Education", is concerned with certain basic concepts. There is no educational system in the world today that can properly be called "Baha'i". Such a system can only be created through the efforts of numerous educators working in diverse settings and cultures over an extended period of time. Nevertheless, certain principles and concepts can be identified that should influence endeavors to develop elements of Baha'i education, and this unit briefly examines some of them.

One of the basic concepts discussed in the unit is the nobility of man. It is essential for the participants in the course -- future teachers of children -- to understand the impact this extremely important principle will have on the kind of education he or she will eventually offer. By the mere acceptance that each student is a "mine rich in gems of inestimable value", the teacher of a beginning children's class takes an enormous step away from current educational practices. Yet the acceptance of this concept is not, in itself, sufficient. Baha'i teachers should also be familiar with the nature of spiritual qualities and know enough about human talents and capacities to be able to discover these gems in their students and actively help polish them. They also have to be fully aware of the importance of helping children develop habits and patterns of behavior that are in keeping with a Baha'i way of life.

In general, this unit is not complex and, like all Ruhi Institute materials, is taught in courses that are conducted tutorially. This is best done by dividing the participants into small groups and allowing each group to move along at its own pace and according to its own rhythm. This point is crucial, because an attempt to accelerate or slow down any participant's pace, forcing him or her to move at the same rate as the others, can hamper the learning process. In this respect it should be noted that the tutor's role is not any less important for the fast learners than it is for those who learn at a slower pace. The tutor should discuss all of the sections with each group of students. A Ruhi Institute course should not be treated as an independent study by the participants, the results of which are merely checked by the tutor. Some discussion with the tutor is needed so that participants understand the materials presented in each section at three levels of comprehension: the meaning of the words and sentences,

the application of the concepts in one's life and work, and their implications for certain related situations. For a fuller explanation of these three levels of comprehension and how to help participants achieve them, please refer to the introduction in Book 1 entitled "To the Collaborators".

## **Unit 2: Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 1**

Purpose: To learn to teach simple children's classes consisting of memorization of prayers and quotations, songs, stories, games and coloring.

*Excerpted from "To the Collaborators":* The second unit, "Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 1", is designed for the training of teachers of first grade Baha'i children's classes. To achieve this purpose, it examines methods that help teachers conduct classes effectively. The unit also contains 15 lessons for the children's classes themselves. Each lesson consists of five parts: memorization of prayers and quotations, songs, stories, games and coloring. It is suggested that these 15 lessons be repeated with the children two or three times throughout the year, making a total of 30 to 45 classes. In helping the participants in the course understand the lesson plans and the methods for conducting them, the tutor should keep the following points in mind:

- The development of capacity for holding a simple children's class, and the acquisition of the corresponding skills, require a great deal of practice. It is to be expected, then, that this course will be long and sometimes even difficult. Teaching a lesson to children demands more than reading the material and understanding its content. The tutor should allow a great deal of time for the future teachers to practice giving the classes as they study the course.
- The majority of people who teach children generally try to recreate for them the same learning experiences they had in their own formative stages. To counteract this normal tendency, this unit offers detailed suggestions to which the tutor and the participants should pay close attention.
- It is hoped that children's classes will provide a means for developing in the children attitudes and spiritual qualities that will bring them closer to God. In the lessons for grade one, the emphasis is on spiritual qualities, and little attention is given to general knowledge about the Faith. When the foundation of the child's character has been established, there is ample time in later years to impart the necessary knowledge.
- The methodology of the children's classes combines different activities, all focused on the principal goal of motivating the development of attitudes and spiritual qualities. All these activities revolve around the Creative Word, which alone has the power to awaken spiritual

susceptibilities in the children, and a strong emphasis is placed on memorizing the Creative Word. Memorization has an even greater effect if what is being memorized is well understood. For this reason, each lesson includes material to help children understand the meaning of the quotation, as well as activities to help further this understanding. Unfortunately, at this point, there is not an abundance of songs, games and stories which directly reinforce the ideas presented in the quotations to be memorized. It is hoped that, in the future, many more such activities will be created and compiled for the use of Baha'i children's class teachers.

- The stories of 'Abdu'l-Baha presented in the lessons are of the greatest importance, because He is the Exemplar of Baha'i life. They illustrate in a concrete way the spiritual qualities that are being explored, and it is well known that concrete situations help, especially children, understand abstract explanations. Some participants may have trouble learning how to tell stories in a way that brings them to life for the children. The ability to remember the details that give excitement to a story and to present the events of the story in an effective way can be acquired by means of constant practice.
- The lesson plans that are included in the unit require very little in the way of materials and outside resources. Besides the teacher's knowledge, acquired through the training offered in this course, only coloring sheets and crayons are needed. The coloring sheets can be simply reproduced by the teachers themselves by tracing them from the sample sheets corresponding to each lesson.
- It is recommended that participants begin putting their new skills into practice as they go through the course. This will allow them to prepare themselves for the time when they will take on their own classes. New teachers may feel nervous the first time they face a class of, say, 20 children, so it is advisable to let them start out alongside experienced teachers or with a small number of children -- perhaps four or five. It is also possible to hold classes which only teach the quotations at the beginning, without worrying about stories, songs and other activities. As the teacher develops confidence, more children can be added to the class and other elements can be introduced.
- A cassette tape of the songs used in the lessons accompanies this material. Teachers may wish to use the cassette, not only to prepare themselves for the class, but also to help the children learn the songs.

### **Unit 3: Conducting Classes for Children**

Purpose: To develop the skills and abilities needed to conduct classes for children, managing the class with a great deal of love and understanding and, at

the same time, with the discipline necessary to create a proper learning environment.

*Excerpted from "To the Collaborators":* When the results of the initial efforts of the Ruhi Institute to help train teachers were evaluated, it became evident that a course on how to manage a children's class was also necessary, especially for those who choose the education of children as a special area of their service to the Cause. The last unit in this book, "Conducting Classes for Children", was developed to answer that need. As in the other courses, the participants should study the unit in small groups with a more experienced person as their tutor. Each section should be read aloud once or twice and then consulted upon by the participants. Each section should be read aloud once or twice and then consulted upon by the participants. An important objective of the unit is to help the participants achieve a balanced understanding of how to keep a class happy and full of love, yet also highly disciplined. Baha'i teachers of children should develop a capacity to inculcate in each child the spiritual discipline that results from love and trust in God, and not impose discipline through fear of punishment.