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Article

Change comes through children

Three important points about working with children

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST, Margaret Mead, gave her life to learning about the cultures of hundreds of diverse societies, patriarchal, matriarchal, competitive, cooperative and others. Did she find any patterns in common? One: "change comes through children".

Three big changes in attitude brought about by the Faith were made clear to me through working with the children at Scarborough:

- moral leadership is serving, not controlling others
- prosperity comes from giving, not accumulation
- education needs cooperation, not competition

The first principle in working with youth and children is preparation, spiritual and practical as well as academic preparation. For weeks ahead, the facilitator (teacher) should study the Writings, pray and ask for inspiration from the Abhá Kingdom as well as from the theme of the conference or the curriculum. What are the children and youth interested in? What will reach them and draw from them advanced levels of understanding? Then as the universe unfolds, in time, confirmations come.

At National Conference these came in the form of Omid Hallam who coordinated the junior youth programme, Anisa George, Heather Burns, Sean Morrissey and Sophie Renwick who facilitated the participation of over 50 junior youth in a series of dramatised vignettes from the Century of Light.

David Woolcombe of Peace Child International, spent his time with the junior youth listening to what they would talk about if they had five minutes with Tony Blair. One youth said peace in Afghanistan, others talked about restoring Nature's resources, several mentioned education, many were querying the use of their time.

At the end of his session, David offered the Peace Child project as a way of influencing change at local and global levels. This project empowers children and youth around the world to speak out and act regarding their future. The youth produce magazines, collect art, poems, information on positive actions and research articles. Books for teachers and a children's version of Agenda 21 have been created. One video shows a 12 year old South American girl pleading for an end to violence, addressing some 200 heads of government at the Earth Summit.

Our session with junior youth followed David Woolcombe's so their discussions helped us decide the choices of what to teach. Several stories were told, and the youth chose which of

the stories they would act out on the basis of interest. The first group acted out the story of Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl, a great scholar who was taught the Faith by an illiterate blacksmith, thereby learning to avoid prejudice regarding education.

The second group acted out Lua Getsinger in Paris bringing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letter to the

Sháh, which taught them the power of prayer. The next group dramatised the courage of May and Mary Maxwell in teaching the Faith and included a speech by a scholar on how prosperity comes from giving, not accumulation.

All of the youth demonstrated the power of cooperation and creativity in producing plays to perform for each other, all in an hour and a half. One youth's potential query to Tony Blair was the need to encourage cooperation and creativity in learning, the means to consultation and practising virtues. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote,

“The law of the survival of the fittest is the origin of all difficulties. It is the cause of war and strife, hatred and animosity between human beings ...⁽¹⁾ (whereas) ... attraction, harmony, unity and Love, are the cause of life ...”⁽²⁾

Are we going to listen to 'Abdu'l-Bahá?

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1. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 8, p. 15

2. *Paris Talks*, p. 139