Portals to Growth: Creating Capacity for Service
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Notes from a Series of Talks by Dr. Farzam Arbab

Day 3
Principles and Practices of Curriculum Design and Development

The discussions we have had in the past two days have touched upon issues related to education, all in the context of the Five Year Plan and the institute process. I would like to take the same approach today as we discuss the subject of curriculum development. In other words, I will not be concerned here with any general theory of curriculum development, but will limit my remarks to practical matters that have a direct bearing on the efforts of training institutes to drive the process of entry by troops.

Let me take the opportunity to mention that not all of our collective educational endeavors are undertaken within the context of the institute process. For example, the Bahá'í community has training in diplomatic work and public information, workshops on the law of Huqúqu'lláh, and seminars on how to deal with social issues such as human rights and the advancement of women. All this training is also aimed at developing human resources to meet the provisions of the community's global plans. Whether or not such training will eventually be offered as specialized courses of the training institute is difficult to anticipate at this stage. So, in general, my remarks on curriculum development will not be directed at this more specialized training, although you may find some of what I say relevant to these efforts as well.

In its 9 January 2001 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice likened an institute's main sequence of courses to the trunk of a tree that supports courses branching out from it. Elaborating on this idea, a letter written by the Department of the Secretariat on behalf of the House of Justice began:

> Given the nature of this agency and the purpose defined for it by the House of Justice, it goes without saying that the emerging training institutes around the world would choose a sequence of courses and offer them to the friends in the territories they respectively serve. To have a large number of believers engaged in the study of these courses, far from a sign of uniformity, is part of the natural dynamics of a successful educational program. That at this point in the development of the Bahá'í community a significant percentage of the training institutes worldwide have opted to initiate their activities with a set of materials that has proven itself effective over many years of experience is a welcome phenomenon.

The letter then went on to say:

> Diversity, it is expected, will gradually be introduced into training programs as the institute process in each country continues to unfold organically. The 9 January

> 2001 message of the Universal House of Justice likened an institute's main sequence of courses to the trunk of a tree, from which branch out other courses. One can already observe a degree of diversity emerging as branch courses begin to appear in some programs, designed to meet specific training needs. The elaboration of such courses will necessarily proceed in a gradual fashion since effective course content will depend on the amount of learning and experience acquired in the field of action.

Our discussion yesterday focused on the sequence of courses that at present constitute the trunk of the tree. It is quite conceivable that, as worldwide experience moves forward, some of the courses that currently constitute the trunk will be revised and changed, that some will be deleted and new ones will take their place. To tell you the truth, I am not sure if, in the long run, we will not have a number of entirely different trees growing and bearing fruit in the different regions of the world. But speculating about this matter may not be the best use of our energies at a time when we are just beginning to establish our worldwide network of institutes and to learn about their role in promoting growth and about the pattern of their operation. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that the institutional capacity that the Four Year Plan called for—to help contingents of believers go through a series of well-conceived courses—is only beginning to appear and only recently has been addressed at the all-important level of the cluster. We do not have infinite resources, and the institutions have to think strategically and decide which needs are most pressing and where our resources can best be directed.

The question of branch courses, however, is a different matter, and I would like to suggest that it is timely to examine the subject of curriculum development in that context. So, for the purposes of today's discussions at least, let us set aside the issue of the main sequence of courses, a specific approach to which has been developed, an approach that now benefits from worldwide experience of the institute process. We know from Book 7 that the main sequence consists of three cycles of five to seven books each, the first centered on what is referred to as "the practice of the freedom the individual has to undertake acts of service within the framework of the teachings of the Faith and the guidance provided by its institutions," the second dedicated to the individual and the community, and the third to the individual and society. Let us explore, then, the nature of the branch courses to which such a trunk will have to give rise and the challenge before training institutes such as yours if they embark on developing curricula for some of them.

It is easy to imagine that some of the branch courses, independent of which institute develops them, will have global applicability. Take, for example courses for the training of children's class teachers or animators of junior youth groups. Although the material for the classes themselves may have to vary according to the needs of the population served, many of the skills, attitudes and qualities and much of the basic knowledge required to perform these acts of service will be the same for anyone who undertakes them, almost anywhere in the world. In general, however, one would expect that a good number of branch courses would be concerned with specific social and cultural settings in order to meet very particular human resource needs.

The question that immediately arises is how to go about identifying these needs, prioritizing them, and developing the courses that will respond to them. It seems to me that, given the organic nature of the process of growth, branch courses should be allowed to emerge naturally, at the right time, at the right places along the main sequence. In other words, the courses should develop human resources that are proving to be essential to sustaining and accelerating the process of entry by troops in a country or region. The training that takes place through the main sequence should give rise to a diversity of action, and as parallel lines of action grow and flourish, the need for certain kinds of training should become apparent. In responding to such needs, the institute will have the assurance that the capacity acquired by those who are trained will be put to immediate use.

The process can be illustrated by examining a need that exists everywhere in the world: to increase the number of those who can teach the Cause effectively. In its 9 January message the Universal House of Justice itself stated:

> As individuals progress through institute courses, they deepen their knowledge of the Faith, gain insights, and acquire skills of service. Some of the courses devoted to teaching will no doubt treat the subject in general terms. Others will focus on various means of sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message with specific segments of society, incorporating the wisdom gleaned from the teaching endeavors of the friends. This combined process of action, learning and training will endow communities with an ever-increasing number of capable and eager teachers of the Cause.

So, let us assume that the overall themes having to do with the duty to teach and the spiritual dynamics of teaching are adequately addressed in Book 6. As an increasing number of believers study the course, participate in reflection meetings, and receive guidance and encouragement from the institutions, the tempo of teaching accelerates. As a result, a diversity of teaching experiences comes into being, which if analyzed systematically, will make it possible to identify one or more highly receptive populations in the region served by a given training institute. Often, the culture and social conditions of such populations demand specific attitudes, specific knowledge and specific skills of the teachers who wish to attract large numbers from among them to the Faith. These requirements clearly need to be addressed in courses that would be placed on a branch or branches after Book 6.

What we are considering in this specific example is the building of the capacity of the institute to train contingents of effective teachers of the Cause, not only in the context of teaching in general, but also for the implementation of teaching campaigns among receptive populations. In developing its courses, the institute would understand that it must be concerned with imparting knowledge and spiritual insights to the friends and with helping them acquire skills to teach the Faith under specific cultural and social conditions. The primary source of this knowledge and spiritual insights is, as it is in the case of Book 6, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh itself. Such a branch course would necessarily draw heavily, then, on the Writings of the Faith. But the question is, which passages, which insights? The answer to this question, I propose, does not come from

mere individual opinion, even when it is based on great erudition, or from mere consultation, although clearly both have important roles to play. The answers to the hundreds of questions that arise as to the content of the course, the passages to be studied, the exercises to be done, the discussions to be fostered, must all be fully informed by experience.

In this sense, the first step in developing a branch course on effective teaching in a specific population is not necessarily to write a course. The first step is to create the experience of teaching in that population and set in motion a learning process. Once this is accomplished, the rest follows. The institute may bring together a group of people who are actively learning how to teach successfully among the population and help them to identify the relevant concepts, the needed attitudes and skills, the challenges faced, and the ways that are proving effective in meeting them. A first version of a branch course may emerge from this attempt at systematization and be tried out by a group of believers who have finished Book 6 and are eager to teach among the population. It is not unreasonable to assume that such training will improve the effectiveness of teaching; more efforts will be crowned with success, and new lessons will be learned. Out of this experience, a second version of the course emerges, further training is offered, and greater impetus is given to the teaching effort. A number of such versions may appear until a course that has proven its effectiveness eventually becomes widely available.

An essential feature of what I have hastily described is that at no time in this process of curriculum development does action await the final preparation and evaluation of educational materials. Teaching and the corresponding training activities proceed with the best materials at hand, in the conviction that through practice and reflection, both pursued in light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, more appropriate curricula will gradually evolve.

This process of curriculum development does not easily admit the usual division into distinct stages: identification of needs, design of material, field testing, training and diffusion. The various components of the process—consultation, action and reflection—are carried out parallel with one another and not performed in a linear sequence. No material, of course, can be in preparation forever, and materials do become finalized when it is noticed that the modifications called for are becoming fewer and fewer.

I hope this example illustrates how curriculum development can be regarded as an integral part of capacity building. Individuals are enhancing their capacity to teach the Cause of God. The institute is learning about growth and increasing its capacity to train teachers who are able to teach effectively among specific populations. And the community as a whole is developing further its capacity to welcome people of diverse backgrounds and grow. In this context, the materials being prepared can be regarded as chronicles of an evolving experience. They are a report of what the community is doing and what it is learning. They are tools for the systematization of knowledge being generated through collective action, as well as the results of that systematization. This does not mean that everyone engaged in teaching and training is a designer of curriculum.

But many people contribute to the process, and in fact, it becomes difficult to easily identify authors, as you have noticed in the case of the books of the Ruhi Institute.

Personally, I do not know how to write educational materials without being part of a learning experience. Therefore, whatever help I can be to you today as we explore this subject can only be in that context. As I share with you, then, some of the ideas I have formulated through the personal study of the writings and the analysis of various educational theories, and from my own participation in curriculum development, I ask you to keep in mind that nothing I will say in this respect carries any authority, scientific or otherwise. You will have to weigh my remarks against your own experience and decide which, if any, you find useful.

In general, when a group of people decides to carry out a set of tasks, there are different approaches the group can choose from. While the various approaches may have certain elements in common, usually, they are each applicable to a particular set of problems. For example, there are tasks that lend themselves to an approach consisting of precise design according to well-defined goals and a clear analysis of resources. The blueprint is then to be followed meticulously with occasional modifications only when absolutely necessary. Building edifices is an obvious example of an endeavor that requires this approach. Another challenge may lend itself to some kind of operational research, a method that suits particularly well situations in which the goal is known and the science of what is to be done is understood, but how to achieve the goal has to be discovered. Traveling to the moon presented one such set of challenges that were resolved one by one through operational research. The medical approach offers us yet another valid methodology. Many problems behave just like illnesses, which require diagnoses and the application of proper medicines.

Applying Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to building a new civilization, I believe, cannot be reduced to a set of problems as the ones I have just mentioned. The process will, of course, include many challenges which will call for one or another of these approaches. There are edifices to be built, procedures to be discovered and established, illnesses to be cured. But the overall process is enormously complex and simplistic ways of approaching it can be counterproductive. We know, of course, that we are not supposed to be haphazard in our endeavors. Just the opposite: The Universal House of Justice has asked for systematization in our efforts to advance the process of entry by troops. This systematization I believe can be achieved if we consciously enter a process of action, reflection on action, and consultation—all carried out with constant reference to the Bahá'í writings and also in close contact with the knowledge humanity has accumulated in relevant fields of endeavor. Action, reflection, consultation and study are not sequential; they are braided together and advance simultaneously. They constitute a mode of operation which should not be mistaken for trial and error. It is a learning mode, not only at the empirical level, but, because of constant reference to the Writings, also at the level of spiritual laws and causes. It can be claimed, then, that the methodology, if handled properly, is scientific.

This is not the occasion for us to discuss methodological issues in detail. There are a few points, however, that I should address because they may be of some practical use in the development of curricula. They all have to do with the statement that action, reflection and consultation should be carried out in the light of the Teachings and also in full awareness of the knowledge accumulated in relevant fields.

Again, speaking only about my own personal experience, I have never found it necessary in my efforts to work in the field of education to adhere to any prevalent educational theories. This does not mean that others should not do so; it may just be a simple matter of preference. I actually find various educational theories quite fascinating, but have used them only as sources of insight and never as statements of truths in which I believe with any degree of conviction.

This attitude actually has its roots in a more general position regarding science itself. I am quite attracted to those philosophers of science that see all scientific theory, including the ones in physics and chemistry, not as explanations of reality as it is, but as sources of insight into reality. The human mind, according to these thinkers, cannot possibly understand the workings of nature as a whole. It necessarily fragments it and tries to understand the fragments. This does not lower the value of science, which is a glorious enterprise, but it does remind us that the models of the fragments science creates cannot possibly correspond to reality as is. The good, grand theories, such as Newtonian Mechanics, Relativity and Quantum Mechanics, offer a great many insights into the workings of the universe, and they are of enormous value. But many of the models and theories of the past that are now out of use were not necessarily wrong; they just gave insights into a few things and could not explain a wide enough range of observations. I suppose one of the reasons I am attracted to this type of thinking stems from my strong attachment to the statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “the inner essence of anything is not comprehended, but only its qualities. For example, the inner essence of the sun is unknown, but is understood by its qualities, which are heat and light. The inner essence of man is unknown and not evident, but by its qualities it is characterized and known. Thus everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence.”

In the field of education, this posture towards theory, as a source of insight rather than a source of infallible truth, has helped many of us make use of scientific advances in the field without falling into the trap of adopting the ideologies underlying them. Every educational theory is built on a particular philosophical and ideological foundation. These philosophical and ideological underpinnings define, among other things, the nature of the human being, the potentialities of the human mind and the human soul, the purpose of education, the potential scope of its influence, the tasks that can be assigned to it and, in the final analysis, a way of viewing the world. Worldviews can range anywhere from those that are extremely materialistic to those that try to strike a balance between the material and the spiritual, all the way to those that may be called “totally other worldly”. Naturally, the content, the processes, the methods and materials of an educational system are strongly influenced by the worldview of the theories on which it is based. A theory built on the notion that education should perpetuate the status quo in a given society will have a vastly different structure than one that considers social transformation a

fundamental purpose of education. A conception of the human being as essentially materialistic, to take another example, with the mind an extremely elaborate computer, will not give rise to the same kinds of theories as those resulting from belief in the powers of the human spirit, illumined by the spirit of faith, infused, in turn, by the Holy Spirit.

There are, of course, those who try to promote their educational theories as scientific knowledge which, they claim, is independent of belief. Statements like "The science of education has proven this and that" are heard all too often, usually as expressions of very naïve perceptions of science, perceptions that have been discredited even in the case of the natural sciences, let alone the social sciences, particularly education. This does not mean that careful observation and the use of a language that is rational and objective is not necessary, if we are to advance in the field of education. But it is a well-established fact in the philosophy and history of science that theory affects even the simplest of observations and that the elaboration of theory is carried out by a scientific community whose programs are significantly influenced by the beliefs its members hold in common. In the final analysis, and this I would like to emphasize, when one adheres to an educational system and follows its theoretical and practical parameters, one is working inside one or another ideological project. Take the example of the rise and spread of consumerism. Independent of what we think of it, of how much of it we like and how much of it we disagree with, we are certainly aware that it is not just happening by itself. We all realize that there is an elaborate system of policies, firms, markets, and media that aggressively propagate it. What may be less obvious is the role the formal school system plays in the spread of this ideology. As early as 19th century in America, is the observation of one author, textbooks and Sunday school literature were dealing with themes that were shaping the direction of consumer society. "The formula for schooling was this: If you worked hard in school and worked hard after graduation (which was a sign of good character), you would be blessed with high income and the ability to consume vast quantities of material goods."

Now, a process of action, reflection and consultation that draws on the Bahá'í teachings and that benefits from various educational theories as sources of insight cannot be undertaken in a vacuum. What I think should happen is for the process to be carried out systematically within a conceptual framework, which in itself is not static but evolving. The framework contains certain elements that are immutable. The oneness of humankind, the equality of women and men, the harmony of science and religion are examples of such elements. But even in these cases, the understanding of what such principles mean evolves through action, reflection and consultation. Other elements of the framework include particular interpretations of certain concepts such as knowledge and learning and their role in the dual transformation we talked about two days ago; a well-thought-out methodological perspective; clear views, for example, on how problems are to be approached, how learning is to occur, how efforts should be organized, how organizations should be run and so on; the list can be quite long. What I think is important is to realize that everyone has such a framework within which he or she acts. For most, however, the majority of the elements operate below the conscious level. More often than not, various elements contradict one another, for they have been adopted here

and there throughout one's life without a great deal of attention. Yet everyone's conceptual framework does show a degree of consistency because so much of it is formed by the culture and ideology of the sector of society to which we belong.

The challenge before us, then, is to create a framework for our processes of action, reflection and consultation, the elements of which are explicit, as consistent as possible, and aligned with the teachings. I hope you will leave this conference highly conscious of the fact that, as far as the institute process and its curricula are concerned, many of the elements of this framework can be found in the guidance of the Universal House of Justice about the Four Year, Twelve Month and Five Year Plans. The process of learning that is taking place worldwide, the results of which are diffused in every continent by the International Teaching Centre through the Counsellors, contributes enormously to the rapid and sound evolution of this conceptual framework, ensuring consistency in our thoughts, bringing clarity to our efforts, and helping us to avoid haphazardness. As we try to articulate regularly what we are doing, subtle shifts in thinking occur. These shifts are evolutionary, not sudden; and we are highly conscious of how the conceptual framework evolves and quite deliberate about it.

Within such a framework, it is not difficult to benefit from educational theories without becoming slaves to them. As ideas are translated into action, modifications are gradually made to methods and materials and thus organically developed curricular elements emerge. Evaluation does not enter as a separate event, because it is embedded in the process itself, largely in "reflection", which is ongoing. Reflection includes analysis and even formal study. It involves restating and restructuring ideas, bringing order to things, and looking for patterns. The process of action-reflection will tell you how fast to go in developing your materials and methods. These will take time to mature, but even in their early stages they can be quite effective.

There is another methodological tool that has helped me a great deal in curriculum development, and I would like to mention it here. Yesterday, we discussed the fact that the books in the main sequence of the Ruhi Institute did not represent a series of subject matters. Rather they were designed according to acts of service. They strive to build our capacity to serve, to develop capabilities of service. In the case of branch courses, I believe there will be some that actually seek to impart knowledge on specific subjects. But the concept of capability to which I am referring is employed in the context of materials designed around acts of service. The challenge of preparing material of this kind is to ensure that the content is not fragmented, and to address as one totality the need to understand certain concepts, acquire certain knowledge, develop certain attitudes and spiritual qualities, on the one hand, and certain skills and abilities, on the other, in order to develop the capability of performing one or more acts of service.

The tool I am referring to here, then, is precisely the concept of capability. I have always avoided defining the concept with any precision. The degree of ambiguity that it tolerates as a concept is part of its charm and utility. I think of a capability loosely in terms of some undefined set of interrelated concepts, bits of information, attitudes, spiritual qualities, skills and abilities that empower a person to think and to act in a well-

defined sphere of activity and according to a well-defined purpose. Teaching Bahá'í classes to children in a specific age group, say, the first grade, in the curriculum with which you are familiar, is one such capability. Clearly, what is at stake is not one skill or even a set of skills, although certain skills are absolutely necessary if one is to be an effective teacher of children of that particular age. Nor are we talking about mere knowledge of what is to be taught to children and how it should be taught, although such knowledge is most necessary, as is some knowledge of educational concepts. That an effective teacher must possess a number of essential qualities and show forth certain attitudes is also clear. But none of these is, in itself, sufficient. Somehow, as a person acquires these various elements, he or she becomes capable of carrying out the duties of a teacher of Bahá'í classes with increasing effectiveness.

There is much to say about how to employ this conceptual tool in the development of curricula and how not to employ it, but there is no reason for us to discuss the matter further here. What I have said up to now allows me to end today's talk with a few insights that I have found useful in my own efforts to work on curricular elements or to help others learn how to do so.

Education is an art and a science. It is a mistake to think of it just as an art, but it is equally wrong to regard it only as a science. The science of education is easily studied, but learning the art of education is not that straightforward; to tell you the truth, how to teach this art has always been a puzzle to me. I have come to understand one thing though: When a glass is full of water, it has no choice but to overflow. Much of art, it seems to me, is like that. The artist, like the glass, must be full—of exquisite feelings, of profound insights, of faith and hope, of love for others, and of confidence, in our case, in the efficacy of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to bring about the dual transformation we are seeking. Theory helps, method helps, but these by themselves are far from sufficient.

In this context, I believe one's sentiments are reproduced in the material one writes. Two people may set out to develop educational materials within the same theoretical and methodological structure; the results may be totally different depending on the spirit with which they approach their tasks. If you love the people for whose education you are preparing material, that feeling will be reflected in the material, and the students will capture it. I always remember one of the pioneers in Colombia who used to do drawings for some of the text we were developing. Her drawings touched people. She told me how disturbed she was to see that material created for educating the poor and the oppressed had a tendency to show people with distorted faces and bodies, presumably to emphasize a life full of problems and unhappiness. Her drawings depicted beautiful and radiant faces. Her love for the people came through, and it made a difference.

Another thing that I have noticed, related to this same idea, is that some educators seem to write material to satisfy themselves; in reading their material one feels they were thinking about themselves all the time they were writing. In preparing curricula, one should be thinking of those who will study them, have them constantly in mind, ever conscious of the love one has for them. The promptings of self have an effect on what comes out of a process of curriculum development. I do not think there is any way to

mask it; no technique will do it. In fact, I have often wondered if the creative process is not hampered by the habit of constantly thinking about oneself. Creativity requires becoming forgetful of self and drowning in the work one is doing. Submission opens the channels of creativity. I am not claiming that all creative people are good people, or are selfless. History proves otherwise. What seems to be the case is that creativity is in need of passion and devotion to what one is trying to do without the constant reminder that "This is what I am doing", "This is the expression of MY thoughts", "I am being creative now." The issue before any one of us is not "How I can write an excellent textbook," or "How I can express all these wonderful things I know". Our work has to be driven by a selfless passion for the cause of education, a yearning for the joy of helping our brothers and sisters develop their potentialities, the joy of witnessing their accomplishments.

A lesson in a textbook, then, is more than what is just written there. Underneath the text there are all sorts of feelings and attitudes that carry their own messages. In fact these hidden messages are often more powerful than the argument being explicitly presented. Imagine, for example, a lesson on sincerity, frankness and respect in Bahá'í consultation. Suppose that the argument is expressed persuasively and accurately, but that the tone is authoritarian and inflexible, or manipulative and derogatory. What will get across is not consultation as a genuine means for the collective investigation of reality but as a way of imposing one's wishes on others.

The most effective educational materials, at least written ones, I have seen tend to talk to the students. They do not just make statements. The conversation being forged should be one that invites the students to think together with those who prepare the text. Questions need to be asked and answers explored in such a way that the students participate in constructing arguments and organizing knowledge. This does not mean, of course, that a well-established body of knowledge should not be presented through eloquent statements. I believe educational material should have a great deal of content. When I hear that such-and-such a curriculum does not impart much knowledge to the students but teaches them to think and discover, I become nervous. How does one teach people to think and discover in vacuum, in the absence of real content, in isolation from revealed knowledge, or human knowledge accumulated throughout the ages? It seems to me that curricula should be quite heavy in content, but present things in such a tone, projecting such attitudes, that it elicits a special kind of participation from the students.

In addition to a proper tone, educational materials need to employ a language that is simple and at the same time lives up to certain standards of beauty and eloquence. It is, of course, easy to write simply and superficially, but complicated language does not necessarily represent depth either. I doubt that simplicity of language should imply a ban on difficult words. Simplicity can be achieved by ensuring that arguments are clear, that sentence structure is not complicated, and that the material itself somehow explains the meaning of words. If, in addition, the language enjoys some degree of elegance and moves with a certain rhythm, the material's clarity and pedagogical value are actually enhanced.

One of the things that bring unnecessary complications to educational material is the desire of the authors to say too much. A lesson that explores one concept and its implications, following an argument like a thread that meanders through a complex body of knowledge, can be far more effective than one that brings in every relevant idea and every related piece of information. In fact if you think of a body of knowledge that can be treated at different levels of depth, by taking a slice of it at a given level and trying to present everything the slice contains, one misses excellent learning opportunities. A thread, on the other hand, can go deep into the body of knowledge when necessary, touching on certain points. A series of lessons constructed this way will represent interacting threads that together weave a pattern.

Now the next point I would like to mention, I have to describe with care because it can give rise to misunderstandings. I have always had difficulty with the widespread procedure in education to define precise goals and objectives for educational material, with the kind of statements that say, "At the end of this lesson the student will be able to do this and that specific thing." I do not wish to deny, of course, that there are many, many cases in which setting precise objectives for an educational activity is possible, desirable and necessary. But it seems to me that there are numerous educational activities in which setting such objectives limits the possibilities of the teaching-learning experience.

Knowledge is not an amorphous body of facts and skills. It has a definite structure. But the structure is not like that of a huge wall that you build brick by brick. The structure of knowledge, I think, is like the structure of the universe. It contains solid things, big and small; it contains substances that flow like water and air; it has luminous bodies and also regions where no light has yet penetrated. We do not learn everything there is to learn in the same way. There are areas of knowledge that are assimilated in measured portions. Certain skills are developed in ways that can be predetermined. There are many things that are finite. But not all knowledge can be broken into bits. In fact, I doubt that most of knowledge is measurable. It is a fallacy of some strands of modern thinking that only that which is measurable is true.

Beauty is certainly not measurable and it stands inseparable from truth; those who insist too much on reducing beauty to something that can be measured end up creating ugliness. Love is not measurable; certain signs of it may be, but the essence of love evaporates when certain intellectual disciplines try to reduce it to the sum of its signs. You will not be surprised when I say that I do not believe that most spiritual subjects can ever fit into theories that can be grasped by the finite mind of the human being. In that realm, much of learning consists of gaining insights. Insights are like points of light in the sky on a clear night. You cannot capture them and make them into some kind of solid object that you can then slice and present to students piece by piece.

In the approach I briefly mentioned before that uses the concept of capability to integrate various elements into a specific educational activity, I have found it much more useful to say that the activity contributes to the development of such-and-such an attitude, that it enhances the understanding of such-and-such a concept, that it facilitates the acquisition

of such skills and abilities. The reason for this is not merely my admittedly biased views on the structure of knowledge, but also because of some of the ideas I mentioned yesterday in the context of capacity building. The real protagonist of a teaching-learning experience is the student not the teacher. It seems unfair to chain down the real protagonist by determining from the outset exactly what he or she is going to learn.

I am sure you realize that I am not promoting a haphazard approach to curriculum development and to education. On the contrary, from what I have seen, there is little that can take the place of a well-designed, highly structured textbook in the teaching-learning experience. But the structure of an educational activity cannot always be a simplistic sequence of steps, each with a clear outcome that educational theory has somehow predicted and prescribed.

If textbooks are written to contribute to the understanding of certain concepts and to the development of certain attitudes, qualities, skills and abilities, and to explore knowledge relevant to this development, then what is achieved by each student in any given direction does not have to be same. Here too, then, we are concerned with advancing a process, not with filling up a container with a measured amount of knowledge. It is, in the final analysis, the student, at least after a certain age as is the case with the youth and adults who participate in our institute courses, who has to figure out how to advance and to what extent he or she has done so during a given period. In this sense, evaluation ceases to be an insurmountable barrier, making educational activity so heavy and so burdensome. Educational activity, in its essence, should be a freeing experience. It should be a joyous experience that gives the students wings to fly into new spaces. So let the objective of a lesson be to enlarge the space in which the student can fly. Let its objective be strengthening the wings of the student so that he or she can fly higher. Let it be opening new doors to spaces that were inaccessible to the student before. But then let the student fly into the new space, explore it, and know it. If the student flies, is that not sufficient evaluation that the educational activity has been a success?

Today, you will come together in small groups for the third time to discuss some aspect of the themes we are exploring here. One set of issues that was addressed today, had to do with methodology. The approach suggested is one in which the development of curriculum is a sub-process of a larger ongoing educational experience directly related to building capacity to advance the process of entry by troops. You may find it useful to reflect on the various experiences--large or small, new or old—that are going on in your clusters and identify those that can contribute directly to the aim of the present Plan. Examples of such efforts are teaching specific populations or bringing about the spiritual empowerment of the junior youth. Next, you may wish to analyze how the learning from each experience can be systematized, and to describe the nature of the human resources needed. You may then explore how, through a process of action, reflection and consultation, curricula could be gradually developed to respond to the human resource needs in each case, to increase the effectiveness of each experience, and to make possible the expansion of its sphere of influence.