A PEDAGOGY OF SERVICE:
Developing spiritual human resources through praxis
in the Ruhi Institute curriculum

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This capstone paper is dedicated to and written for the tutors and coordinators of the Crimson Ark region. Your experiences, insight, and learnings are the substance of this work. It has been an honor and pleasure to serve you, in the name of Bahá’u’lláh. Thank you for the opportunity.
It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

~ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 249
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The Crimson Ark Regional Training Institute (RTI), an agency providing training for Bahá’í communities in the Mid-Atlantic area, utilizes a curriculum designed by the Ruhi Institute in Puerto Tejada, Colombia, for developing the knowledge, skills and awareness needed for spiritual community development. Whereas each course has both theoretical and practical components, it has been especially challenging to encourage participants to carry out the community building practices associated with the curriculum text. This paper seeks to address this issue from the perspective of those who lead the trainings, exploring how we can better facilitate the training process, to ensure that the activities are conducted and participants are equipped with the intended capabilities.

The paper begins by comparing and contrasting the Ruhi curriculum with pedagogy of the oppressed, themes of critical consciousness building, and liberation theology. Qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to the RTI’s activity in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC is presented and analyzed through a process of action research, exploring the dynamics of increasing the desire and ability to be of service to one’s community. The paper then concludes by outlining actions to be taken by those who facilitate and coordinate the trainings, including: doing the practices for oneself and then creating and setting up opportunities for participants to practice their skills, sharing learnings between study groups, and strengthening lines of communication between coordinators, tutors and participants.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the tutors and coordinators in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC for their willingness to participate in the research process. I hope you learned as much through the research as I did.

My appreciation is also extended to Ruth Enslow for her several days of assistance in analyzing the data, to Professor James Breeden for his helpful guidance and insights for this project, to my father, Richard Gregory Clark for his editorial comments, and to my wife, Anahita Anvari-Clark for her patience, sacrifice and support.

And finally, thanks be to God, for giving me “Thy grace to serve Thy loved ones…”
Introduction and Research Question

In the Bahá’í Faith, a world-wide religion and spiritual community, there exists at the grassroots level a campaign of education and training. The initiative, utilizing a curriculum developed by the Ruhi Institute in Puerto Tejada, Colombia, is designed to raise the number of people able to carry out the many activities associated with life in the Bahá’í communities. The series of seven courses comprising the curriculum (referred to as Books 1-7\(^1\)) imparts both spiritual transformation – the desire to be of service to God and our fellows, and skill development – the ability to be of service. Each course has both theoretical and practical components associated with the theme of the particular book. The theoretical material draws on Bahá’í scripture and writings, while the practical exercises provide opportunity for participants to develop skills needed for community development. Together, these two components foster a learning process of study, action and reflection that guide the participant in understanding the dynamics of spiritual development and enable them to undertake individual initiatives for the benefit of the community.

The typical training course is conducted either over a few intensive weekends, or meeting as a weekly ‘study circle’ for a few months, with group sizes generally ranging from 2 to 10 people. Total study time is usually between 25 and 50 hours, depending on the course. Each training is facilitated with one or two ‘tutors’ who have previously studied the book and taken the final course which introduces the dynamics of facilitating. In this manner, anyone can be a tutor. Area coordinators, in consultation with the tutors,

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\(^{1}\) Book 1 – Reflections on the Life of the Spirit; Book 2 – Arising to Serve; Book 3 – Teaching Children’s Classes, Grade 1; Book 4 – The Twin Manifestations; Book 5 – Teaching Children’s Classes, Grade 2 (not in wide use yet in U.S.); Book 6 – Teaching the Cause; Book 7 – Walking Together on a Path of Service.
manage the training logistics, ensuring that trainings are widely and consistently offered with high standards of quality to any person who wishes to take part. Tutors will meet together to share experiences, receive further training, and consult with area coordinators at periodic ‘tutor encounters’.

While the curriculum is being used with encouraging results around the world, successful implementation carries with it a learning process of its own. The manner in which the theoretical teachings are enacted in the practical component of the studies are however, often influenced by the generally accepted means of expression and action within a local community’s culture. Thus, while the practice of sharing a prayer with a friend or going to visit a new believer in their home in some areas is quite culturally comfortable, in others, engaging in such activities requires courage and imagination by the individual.

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and elsewhere, such community building and social bonding activities have, been either overlooked, side stepped, or vaguely implemented, in many cases. While many have gone through the text material of the courses, participant’s level of social comfort is often tested as they confront activities contrary to a materialist culture and they thus opt not to do the practice. The main set of practices, one for each book, are: regularly praying and sharing prayers with others, visiting and doing basic education with new believers about the tenets of the Faith, teaching children’s classes (two courses), learning to narrate the life histories of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, introducing others to the Bahá’í Faith, and serving

2 The Báb (trans. ‘the Gate’ in Arabic) (1819-1850) was the herald of Bahá’u’lláh (trans. ‘the Glory of God’)(1817-1892). The Báb is considered to have been a prophet or manifestation of God with His own, albeit brief, revelation from 1844 until His martyrdom in 1850. Soon after, while imprisoned as a follower
as a facilitator or tutor of this series of courses. With these practices often absent from the training, the intended outcomes – spiritual transformation and skill building – have fallen far short of their potential. Within the United States, Broward County, FL and Harris County, TX are two particular areas where successful theoretical and practical training have been observed.

Around the world, learnings are gleaned and shared within the Faith regarding the implementation and impact of the Ruhi Institute’s curriculum. Yet, in each locality, the Bahá’ís themselves need to explore the ways in which the practice components of each course may be carried out so that, upon completing the sequence of courses, individuals will realize their own importance to the community’s development and initiate acts of service toward that end. Its value is this: through a praxis of study, action and reflection, a critical consciousness develops and capacities for serving, both individually and collectively are increasingly gained, resulting in the organic development of the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary for a social change in which all who desire may participate.

The interest in conducting this study developed when I was doing my practicum, serving with the Crimson Ark Regional Training Institute (RTI), one of nine agencies established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States to facilitate the process of training for the Bahá’ís in this country. The jurisdiction of the Crimson Ark RTI spans Delaware, Maryland, Washington, DC, Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Within a network of individuals functioning as area coordinators and

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of the Báb’s teachings, Bahá’u’lláh received His revelation (1852) and proclaimed His station in 1863 as the Promised One of all ages. A Bahá’í is a follower of Bahá’u’lláh and His Faith.
tutors, I served in a pilot project position, as an area coordinator in Baltimore County, MD, Howard County, MD, and Washington, DC. My primary focus was on enhancing the process of skill development in the trainings. By working with tutors who facilitate the courses (and often serving as a tutor, myself), I appreciated the insight and creativity these tutors and fellow area coordinators generated as a result of the increased focus on the practices.

So far, the progress and learning attained in the Crimson Ark region in terms of implementing the practices has been sporadic and piecemeal, lacking a systematic process of inquiry. While some learnings have been achieved, much more remains to be done and explored. Thus, for this study, we used a process of systematic study, action, and consultation as the framework in which to learn – a framework being utilized by the global Bahá’í community as a general system for individual and collaborative learning in the field. The question under consideration is therefore: **How can coordinators and tutors better facilitate the training process to ensure that the curriculum’s skill building activities are implemented?** Associated questions also include: **How can participants be equipped with the necessary capacities for spiritual community development? What tools may assist this training process? What forms of encouragement will enable participants to do the practices? How can learnings be effectively and systematically shared among tutors in our locality?**

**Conceptual / Research Framework**

In defining community, the Universal House of Justice, the global administrative body of the Bahá’í Faith, states that:
...it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress (1996, paragraph 25).

As Bahá’í communities develop, the processes which take place are participatory and organic, founded upon a premise of unity in diversity. Since there is no clergy within the faith, the majority of activities carried out depend upon the initiative of the individual, encouraged by the Faith’s administrative institutions. As individuals not only agree to work in unity, but find the wisdom in so doing, through a process of frank, loving and disinterested consultation, they are able to take on collective activities. As Bahá’ís mature, they learn to look to the Word of God, holy texts and the writings of their institutions for a common reference point upon which to base their action. From this common grounding, the diversity of views on the action to take are contributed and explored. And finally, “the shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions” (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978, p. 87). From this, the group then acts in concert, hopefully in full unity, but at least according to the opinion of the majority.

The idea of individuals benefiting from and contributing to their community is similar to the relationship of bodily cells to an organ, each carrying out their particular functions and talents. When the organs begin to work in unison, the body itself not only functions as a biological entity, but is able to support a consciousness. While effort is certainly needed to maintain the components of that body, the harmoniously working

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3 The administrative order is composed of two complementary branches. One is of democratically elected bodies of nine individuals each at the local, national and international levels. The other is of appointed individuals who provide counsel, guidance, information, and encouragement to the elected institutions and individuals in matters of the Faith’s protection and propagation. The Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice have executive, legislative, and judicial powers as corporate institutions, whereas the Counsellors, their auxiliaries and assistants serve as individuals in advisory roles.
system may take on endeavors of collective action which contribute to the advancement of civilization and society (Universal House of Justice, 1986, p. 43).

Such a functioning system however cannot come about as a result of the social processes and trends of self-interested activity current in today’s society. Rather, through systematic training and encouragement, new understandings of spiritual and social reality are realized and the ability to wield the learned tools of service and collaboration are put into practice. The individual begins to understand for what purpose they were created (to know and to worship God), that their spiritual development is intertwined with that of humanity’s, and he or she experientially learns how to collaborate with other individuals, in increasingly complex patterns of organic action, for social and material development.

An example of such a process may be observed when looking at the beginnings of the Ruhi Institute in the 1970’s when the small community of Bahá’ís in Colombia were grappling with how to carry out the processes of expansion and consolidation⁴ for the development of the Faith in that area. By reflecting on the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith, consulting on initiatives to be taken, acting on those initiatives together, then learning from their experiences and consulting on modifications for future actions, the curriculum was designed out of the popular experience within the community (Ruhi Institute, 1991).

This process of development – participatory action, learning, consultation – reflects the principle of unity in diversity in the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith, as described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of Bahá’u’lláh:

Strive with all your hearts and with the very power of life that unity and love may continually increase. In discussions look toward the reality without being self-

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⁴ In this case, expansion and consolidation refer to the process in which the number of Bahá’ís in the community increases (expansion) and then the subsequent nurturing necessary for each new member of the community to begin contributing to community activities based on individual and collective initiative (consolidation).
opinionated. Let no one assert and insist upon his own mere opinion; nay, rather, let each investigate reality with the greatest love and fellowship. Consult upon every matter, and when one presents the point of view of reality itself, that shall be acceptable to all. (1982, p. 183)

Thus, in exploring the answers to the question of skill development for this project, we tried a popular and organic approach, as action research (Diessner, 2000), leading to a case study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). ‘Unity in diversity,’ as explained above, is the world-view through which we conducted the research and analyzed our findings.

To frame the process of how the Ruhi Institute spurs a spiritual transformation and skill development leading to tangible actions, the following logic model was used (See Figure 1: Logic Model):

Figure 1: Logic Model.
In this model, participants and facilitators utilize course books from the Ruhi curriculum, and supplement these materials with extra-curricular activities to develop skills, illustrate concepts, and build community among the members. The interplay between text study, practicing skills, and service activities takes a systematic study of the Word of God and encourages participants to develop ways in which they can orient their lives to manifest the Word into action, cultivating an attitude of service to participants’ Bahá’í community and locality at large. In theory, this process then produces a deepening pool of human resources (International Teaching Center, 2003a).

As a result of the process, three levels of outcomes may be identified. The initial outcome is the participant who has both the desire and ability to be of effective service to others and their immediate community. The intermediate outcome will see an increase in initiatives that the individual takes and gradually engages in the first stages of unified collective activity. Finally, in the long term, there is a multiplication of those community building activities which have been identified in the Ruhi curriculum, other activities based on popular grassroots experience, and also those outlined by the Universal House of Justice in their guidance of the global Bahá’í community’s progress. This scope of individual activity then develops the foundational processes and interactions of unity in collective action that are necessary for moving the community to higher stages of growth, capacity, and development (“Learning”, 1991; International Teaching Center, 2003a). The scope of our research will then generally focus on the first half of this process, fostering individual initiative.
Literature Review

To the best of my knowledge, the Ruhi curriculum is unique, unprecedented, and relatively unknown in the academic world outside the Bahá’í Faith. As one studies various aspects of the curriculum’s design and its potential, to gain a more full understanding it can be useful to contrast it against Paolo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 1970; 1998a; 1998b) and the development of critical consciousness (Mustakova-Possardt, 2004). From a religious viewpoint, liberation theology (Gutiérrez, 1973; Vásquez, 1997; Bedford, 1999; Ribeiro, 1999; Kater, 2001; Cevallos, 2002) offers some comparison in terms of religious communities developed through the participation and action of their members, though differences exist in worldviews and thereby theological practices. In our case, a program of human resource development that is systematically implemented in virtually every community of a particular faith in the world (itself a product of popular experience), for the purpose of consolidating and expanding the community in which the participants are trained, for which the training of course facilitators is built into the curriculum structure for the rapid multiplication of the courses offered – such a design of similar adult education and training has yet to be developed, or this one studied in depth by academics.  

Even within the Bahá’í Faith, scholarship has focused primarily on community and moral development, education, youth, and theological topics. Little has been studied or published on the efficacy or design of the Ruhi curriculum. This lack of literature is

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5 While the curriculum is designed for Bahá’í resource development, often individuals from outside the Faith will join a group study of the first book, focusing on basic Bahá’í teachings, prayer, and life and death. This seems to be the only way that one from the larger academic community would be introduced to the curriculum and then his or her interest peaked as an object worth studying.

due in part to the short five year span in which the courses have been offered to large
numbers of participants. Furthermore, in many US communities in which individuals are
highly educated, the Ruhi pedagogy was viewed as simplistic and unchallenging
(L. Bramson, personal communication, June 22, 2005). Some of the initial resistance to
taking the courses has eased over time as their importance and purpose is better
understood – namely that the courses are purposed to develop skills rather than simply
deepen one’s understanding of the Faith’s precepts.

What do exist, are some compiled learnings around the training and utilization of
the newly inspired resources, as reported by local communities and then gathered at the
regional, national and international levels for distribution to the larger Bahá’í community.
Thus it has taken a process of trying the courses, evaluating their efficacy at the
grassroots level, identifying patterns of success or obstacles, and relaying these learnings
to the coordinating institutions. For example, seven months prior to the writing of this
paper, a document was distributed which explicitly identified the need to address the skill
development component of the courses (International Teaching Center, 2004).

For the purpose of relating this study to the current body of academic literature
available on the above topics, it would be best to identify how human resource
development is defined by the Ruhi Institute itself:

Human resource development in this context… embodies two principles that
distinguish it from prevalent models of adult education. The pace at which
believers move along their paths of spiritual development is not predetermined,
but varies according to individual desires and aspirations in an open learning
process. And, the nature of the educational process is such that those who receive
attention also nurture others. This approach to the development of human
resources, then, differs from traditional schemes of schooling which, in a
paradoxical way, efface individuality while rewarding and cultivating selfishness. *Human resource development is understood as that process which catalyzes the emergence of workers for the Cause who are entirely dedicated to the service of others and committed to the spiritual movement of their people.* (Ruhi Institute, 1991, p. 27) [emphasis added]

We thus see that education is both a spiritual and practical endeavor. It is also both an individual and communal / structural endeavor. It is not a training for individual salvation or liberation as an end, but “one which implies a constant effort to create and strengthen the institutions of a new social order” (Ruhi Institute, 1991, p. 57). Like the lone cell in a body, it does not survive on its own and its individual enlightenment and spiritual or material liberation in isolation from others is of little benefit to the rest of the organs and body. However, if by the cell’s education it begins to contribute to the well being of the organs, to their harmonious functioning, it then contributes to the spiritual and material movement of the whole.

**Pedagogy and Developing Critical Consciousness**

As an individual proceeds through the sequence of Ruhi courses, they do so by engaging in three levels of comprehension: 1) understanding the meanings of words and sentences in passages from the Holy Writings, 2) conceptually applying some of the spiritual concepts to one’s daily life and 3) thinking about the implications of those verses (Ruhi, 1987). The curriculum then gives lines of service so the Word may be manifested into action – such as sharing or studying a prayer with another person. In the Ruhi Institute’s Book 1 – *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, the introductory section entitled “To the Collaborators,” explains that experience has shown that “examining ideas at
these three levels of understanding helps collaborators create the *conscious basis of a life service* to the Cause” (1987, p. 2) [emphasis added]. It further details the pedagogy:

In a process of education, in contrast to the mere acquisition of simple skills, it is essential that participants become increasingly conscious of the meaning and significance of what they are doing. As this consciousness emerges, students come to see themselves as active, responsible “owners” of their learning, and not as passive recipients of information given to them by their teachers. (p. 3)

The pedagogy of the Ruhi Institute places a simultaneous emphasis on both *being* and *doing* and this understanding progressively unfolds throughout the sequence of courses. In Book 6 – *Teaching the Cause*, the Institute explains that these are “two inseparable dimensions of Bahá’í life… [We] must strive daily to refine our inner lives and, at the same time… gain experience” (1998, p. 1).

The spiritual dynamic of this ‘emerging consciousness’ comes about through a process of action and reflection. This consciousness, is in fact, faith enacted. In reading a tablet by Abdu’l-Bahá, one learns in Book 7 – *Walking Together on a Path of Service*, that: “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds” (2001, p. 20). Therefore, for Bahá’ís, obedience to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and its Institutions is a prerequisite posture that one may then be open to learn and attain conscious knowledge or understanding through the praxis with good deeds. To do something only for obedience is not sufficient – applying oneself to try to understand and act is required. To stay at the level of obedience is to blindly accept and should not be an end in itself, inasmuch as we have been bestowed with rational faculties for the purpose of understanding. Because faith and consciousness are so intimately linked, the educational methods fostering consciousness must be grounded in spiritual reality. The raising up of human resources for the service of the Bahá’í community becomes not
merely an endeavor to share the functional duties among a larger spread of individuals, but rather an opportunity for each unique human being to find historical and spiritual expression, through critical understanding and enacted service to humanity.

Similar to the Ruhi Institute, the approach of Paolo Freire’s work focuses on raising critical actors, but from a different grounding. Using culture as the source of content for an educational program (1998a), one explores their relationship with their surrounding environments. Through critical analysis and action upon those environments, an ever increasing awareness is developed. The methods and tools one uses in approaching change would thereby also be grounded in culture, evolving from the praxis. As a result, the forces influencing our environment may be changed locally, in the local context, but between cultures, between environments, or at a global level in a global environment, cultural norms and processes lose application. Even if facilitated in every culture of the world, this post-modernist approach to social change education is historically and locally bound, and lacks the spiritual orientation necessary for progressive culture change.

From a universalist’s perspective, an individual’s dawning consciousness that is enacted in the praxis of faith brings with it an understanding of the spiritual reality of all people and the ability to effect social change with others, across cultures through patterns of unity in diversity. In a lecture on the topic, Mustakova-Possardt explained that movements developing critical consciousness share the same goal, where one understands a problem with their environment, they feel responsible and able to address the issue in collaboration with others, they have the know-how to effect change (or creativity to find ways to do so), and are motivated by a sense of justice (2004). These
movements however would need a common grounding to collaborate. Unless critical actors recognize the oneness of all humanity and expand their focus from their immediate historical environment to engage in the global historical and spiritual processes taking place, we limit what our global society has the potential to achieve.

In His Tablet of the World, Bahá’u’lláh wrote: “Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self” (1978, p. 87). In this context, we are called to consciousness. We see that by orienting our lives outwardly, the cell to other cells, organs and systems, each individual has the potential to be a critically conscious social actor striving in harmony with the global body of humanity.

While Freire’s work certainly underscores the importance of collaborative initiatives, the closest I find that he comes to incorporating the spiritual dimension of human beings is in his discussion of ‘humanizing’ the oppressed and the oppressor through dialogue – “only through communication can human life hold meaning” (1970, p. 77). The dialogue, as he explains, must be founded upon love, humility, faith in what is possible and hope, among other spiritual qualities (p. 91). However, Bahá’ís believe that the meaning in human life is derived from acknowledging God’s messenger for the time in which one is living and to worship God through adherence to the laws and teachings set forth by that messenger (Bahá’u’lláh, 1992, p. 21). It is through recognizing the

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7 Bahá’í teachings offer the concept of ‘progressive revelation,’ in which God’s prophets, messengers, or ‘manifestations,’ who include Krishna, Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh, are sent to humanity with a revelation that is appropriate for the time and place in which it is revealed. As humanity has matured, the spiritual teachings of God are continually re-revealed, while the social teachings are abrogated, revised and updated according to the needs of the day. In this day, Bahá’ís believe that Bahá’u’lláh was sent to usher in the era of global unity, much as the teachings of previous Manifestations inspired social development in earlier eras. The spiritual teachings remain the same between revelations – to love one another, to be in devotion to God – while the social teachings are updated –
source of spiritual life that one can purposefully reflect God’s qualities for the spiritual
growth and liberation of humanity (love, humility, devotion, sacrifice), utilize them in a
constructive dialogue or consultation that seeks justice, and then act upon the decisions
consulted upon, while all the time recognizing that the end goal is the unification of
humanity as one consciously acting organic unit (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1957). While
Bahá’u’lláh admonishes the oppressors on the earth throughout His writings for their
unjust actions, the dichotomy between oppressed and oppressor is not emphasized as it
had been in previous eras. Using such dichotomous language could be likened to
approaching the arm or foot of the body as being evil and seeking to dismantle it for the
benefit of the rest. Such a course according to the Bahá’í perspective would be unwise –
rather through the healing balm of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation, the transformative Word of
His teachings, can that part of the human be healed, enabling it to contribute to the body’s
whole (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978).

Freire’s description of drawing on the participant’s experience as the source of
their education (1970, p. 107) resonates with Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching: “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” (1952, p. 260). The Ruhi curriculum
draws the participants’ experience and history into the education by providing
opportunity for them to reflect on the Writings as a whole and on the meanings of
individual words, and to explore how one may live a life conducive to their own and their
community’s spiritual growth. Thus, personal liberation is acquired in terms of freeing
oneself to engage in activity within a framework that is oriented by the Faith’s teachings and the guidance of its institutions (Arbab, 2004b).

**Spiritual Dimensions of Liberation**

To further explore this theme of spiritual reality as a basis for developing consciousness and thereby effecting social change, liberation theology can serve as a useful point of reference. Gutiérrez describes three forms of liberation which the theological approach seeks to attain: from the oppressive processes of the social, economic, and political development industry; from the oppressive cycles of history; and from sin, through salvation in Christ (1973, pp. 24-25). From the point of view of a Bahá’í, a process of material liberation at the grassroots is certainly encouraged (through the application of spiritual principles). The advancement of civilization based on critical historical analysis is also important to Bahá’ís, but in terms of an historical-spiritual perspective. As religious teaching states that true life is the life of the spirit (Bahá’u’lláh, 1931, p. 120), one may observe that the cycles of crisis and achievement, social degradation and progress over the span of recorded material history are linked with the coming of God’s manifestation on earth during the troughs of human perversity and spiritual emptiness. As humanity is guided by adhering to renewed Divine law and applying His Teachings to the oppressive conditions of the day, progressive stages of civilization are wrought (Bahá’u’lláh, 1931).

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In the late 1990’s and early part of the current century, several studies were undertaken, testing the pulse of practiced liberation theology (Vasquez, 1997; Bedford, 1999; Ribeiro, 1999; Kater, 2001; Cevallos, 2002). Vasquez, who studied a base community in Brazil, observed both factors within and outside the religious community which contributed to the decline in such activity, including “tensions between the pastoral agent and lay people and among different lay factions” (1997, n.p.). Changes in the support by the Catholic Church for liberation theological methods were also cited as reasons for the community’s decline (1997, n.p.). He recounted how a handful of lay people were focused on and trained by the pastors to organize faith community activities, evangelization, and the delegation of several of the traditionally pastoral duties during mass (1997, n.p.). Aspects of their scriptural study, pastoral duties, and education would seem similar to the trainings of the Ruhi Institute, though there are key differences: The training of human resources has been strongly encouraged and supported by the Universal House of Justice and the National Spiritual Assemblies around the world; training is open for all and not just a hand-picked few; community consolidation work is to be engaged in if community expansion efforts are to bear lasting fruit (rather than pure evangelization by lay persons), and those who are resistant to taking part in the training are asked to support and encourage the initiative, rather than seek to undermine it.9 All of this is to be understood within the worldview context of the collective liberation (spiritual and material freedom to be of service) of humanity rather than a piecemeal project more focused on local diversity of thought than on unity of endeavor.

One key issue worth mention relates to Christianity’s emphasis on personal salvation through the manifestation of God. Because humanity and civilization have

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9 Such subversion would be antithetical to the fundamental premise of the Faith – uniting humanity.
advanced since the times of Christ, the emphasis on personal duty has likewise shifted.

Farzam Arbab, one of the principle individuals who engaged in the formation of the Ruhi Institute and curriculum, describes it this way:

The fact that the goal of religious practice is shifted from individual salvation to the collective progress of the entire human race is reflected in the Bahá’í teachings in the change of emphasis on the qualities to be acquired by each believer. For example, while charity, so essential to Christian theology is still highly praised, justice is given a far more central place…

In the same way, while tolerance is recommended, those attitudes that lead to unity and human solidarity are far more appreciated. In general, moral behavior is analyzed from the point of view of the achievement of human potential, individually and collectively, thus liberating the believer from the feelings of guilt so common in many religions. (1987, p. 10)

Thus, for Bahá’ís, liberation from personal sin is only a small part of the salvation of humanity. The Ruhi curriculum is therefore a tool to train us in service to that end.

As Gutiérrez explored the necessary implications of building the Kingdom of God, he noted that the “lay persons will seek to create with others, Christian or not, a more just and more humane society” (1973, p. 37). To facilitate this process, he notes that the Church itself will need to undergo a transformation: acknowledging and acting in solidarity with the oppressed social reality (p. 63), supporting a “liberating education” (p. 65), and encouraging the “active participation of the oppressed” (p. 67). To act in solidarity with the oppressed, the Church must extract itself from the unjust political structures with which it has aligned itself for hundreds of years. Not only is a political liberation imperative for the institution, but a complete “revision of what the Church has been and what it now is has become necessary” (p. 141). Yet, the practicability of such an endeavor is questionable. In Mathew 9:17, Christ said: “Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.” Filling the old structure
with new life, with critically conscious social actors will destroy the Church, as the politically and materially vested clergy are well aware in their resistance to structural change. Rather, what is needed is a new institution to undertake this work. Gutiérrez states that to act in solidarity with the oppressed, the Church must extract itself from the unjust political structures with which it has aligned itself for hundreds of years. Not only is a political liberation imperative for the institution, but a complete “revision of what the Church has been and what it now is has become necessary” (p. 141).

For the Bahá’í Community, a new structure to contain the new spiritual life of the time, it is possible to see some aspects of the old spirit, as Bahá’ís often come from clergy dominated faiths and sometimes bring with them the culture of dependency. But as a new structure, the Bahá’í institutions are designed to function ideally in a culture of popular initiative and ownership. Thus, the Ruhi Institute’s curriculum serves as a ‘liberating education,’ facilitating the process needed to free oneself from self- and socially-imposed spiritual oppressions, a process emphatically and patiently encouraged by the institutions and leaders of the Faith at every step in its development.

Pedagogy of the oppressed, liberation theology, and the Ruhi curriculum all find substantial common ground in the use of personal experience, communal history and storytelling as sources for contextualizing one’s own historical presence and using it as reason and inspiration for taking transformative action. In his article, *Method in liberation theologies*, Peter Phan highlights the use of stories – both biblical and from the oppressed person, folktales, and historical injustices – stating that storytelling “makes liberation theologies concrete, rooted in real life experiences, and historical” (2000). Because the Bahá’í Faith is only a little more than a century and a half old, the stories are
not simply lore passed down and interpreted through the generations, but are often factually verifiable through documented and published eyewitness accounts. Stories of the early believers, often only 100 years old or less, also abound, aiding the listener to relate to the experience of a contemporary in similar situations. In *Century of Light*, a document commissioned by the Universal House of Justice in 2001, it states:

> History is a powerful instrument. At its best, it provides a perspective on the past and casts a light on the future. It populates human consciousness with heroes, saints and martyrs whose example awakens in everyone touched by it capacities they had not imagined they possessed. It helps make sense of the world -- and of human experience. It inspires, consoles and enlightens. It enriches life. (p. 69)

Within the Ruhi curriculum itself, there are perhaps two points to note in this theme: personal contextualization through reflection and practice, and the use of stories in the curriculum. As described above, in each course, participants read the Word and teachings, and are guided through three aspects of comprehension – understanding, applying, and thinking about its implications. While the curriculum serves as a guide for ways the Writings may be manifested into action, how it is carried out is up to the context and individual: in a large formal group, or informally one on one; spontaneously or planned out; in a solemn atmosphere or with loud joyous singing – the unity is in the effort to share the prayers, while the diversity is in how the prayers are shared.

Second, within the curriculum, Book 4 – *The Twin Manifestations* is devoted solely to the history of the lives of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Some of the material is based on eye witness account, while the majority is in Their own words and writings, much of which has been preserved in archives and is still being translated. Such an understanding of the cycles of hardships and victories in the history of the Faith enables the Bahá’ís to connect with purpose and understanding of the Faith’s roots and see where it is directing
us. Furthermore, a component of the facilitator training (the final book in the sequence), is dedicated solely to the use of arts at the grassroots within the study circle, including crafts, song and music, storytelling and drama. With such components incorporated into the fabric of Bahá’í education and development of the human resources within the Faith, we can see its usefulness as a tool for spiritual liberation.

**Research Methods**

Given the participatory, organic and democratic nature of the Bahá’í Faith, the question of how to develop skills more effectively needed to be answered within a process of learning through group exploration, consultation, action and reflection.

Referring back to Abdu’l-Bahá’s quote on consultation, it is through consultation and discussion, through putting forth various perspectives with an attitude of detached offering to the group one’s ideas and perceptions, that the group may consider the various points and gradually come closer to the truth.

As the individual writing the capstone paper, as a coordinator and tutor, I was thus dependent on the collaboration and input of several groups. In describing action research from a Bahá’í perspective, Diessner writes:

> Regardless of the starting point of the question, those immediately and substantially affected by the potential outcome of the research should have a voice in framing or reframing the question under study, a voice in selecting the means of answering the question... and a voice in determining the criteria to decide whether the question has been validly answered (2000).

Therefore, I consulted fellow RTI area coordinators, course facilitators (tutors), and participants in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC. Because those individuals who are active in the institute process are generally very busy in other aspects of service, the
contributions by others in framing the research and conducting the analysis were limited, despite efforts for inclusion.

The conceptual framework schematic and proposed questions for the research project as well as questions for specific data gathering were all reviewed and modified by a group of individuals serving in these capacities. A trial questionnaire was drafted and offered to a Book 7 study circle. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Data was collected from a total of 37 participants, between April 30 and May 11, 2005 at two study circles and two tutor encounters. The primary focus was to gather data from those individuals (area coordinators and tutors) who would most immediately be able to utilize the findings of the research. 34 participants answered the questionnaire either at the meetings, or submitted it on their own time by email. Part 1 of the questionnaire was for all participants, while Part 2 was for tutors specifically. This was used to gather hard and comparable data from the participant’s own experiences. At the two tutor encounters, one in Baltimore and one in Washington, each approximately 45 minutes in duration, 17 tutors and coordinators discussed in a focus group style the question: *How can area coordinators and tutors increase the effective implementation of practices in the Ruhi courses?* Responses were taken down as notes and retyped immediately afterwards. This technique was used to help generate ideas and spread immediate learning in a consultative format. It would also reveal the current level of group awareness and development. Finally, a document search was conducted from letters and reports issued at the various institutional levels – regional, national, and international – to use as a point of reference for the grassroots learning and to augment
various findings. Course books and related published materials were also referenced. In total, responses came from a diverse group in terms of age, gender, and ethnic background. In addition, responses were gathered from individuals with a variety of experience in the Ruhi institute process: some who have only been participants, some who have served also as tutors, and some who have served additionally as coordinators. 59% of the study’s participants had completed the full sequence of courses.

After the data was gathered, the findings were analyzed in collaboration with another tutor. Only she was able to dedicate the necessary time for this phase of the activity. Data from the questionnaire was entered into a generic database program. Open responses were then coded for cross comparison. Data from the focus groups was coded and placed on a series of concept maps. The documents were used as points of reference against the findings in the other data gathering modules.

Data analysis was to be based on the categories determined by the area coordinators, tutors and course participants. The categories which surfaced from participants’ questionnaire responses and the focus groups relate to various components of the individual’s developing awareness, including: intra-personal qualities and experiences; personal desire for quality, attitudes, skill abilities, awareness, critical mass, collaboration, sharing of learnings, and actions by tutors and coordinators. The findings then end with directions and actions for facilitating growth.

Presentation of Data
Qualitative Data
For presenting the qualitative data gathered from the focus groups at the two tutor encounters, the quotes have been gathered and shaped into composite sketches,
maintaining the voice and thematic content of the conversations. The individuals below are fictional, but represent characteristics of individuals in their respective communities. The first, that of “Nasrin”, is a monologue in response to the question asked at the gathering. The second, a dialogue between “Anthony” and “Dotty”, answers the same question: *How can area coordinators and tutors increase the effective implementation of the skill development component of the Ruhi Institute curriculum?*

| Nasrin – Female, Persian American, 30, completed sequence, Washington, DC Cluster |

“Some of the courses I did when serving in the Holy Land, and we didn’t do the practices. But, after taking Book 4 this past year, I definitely got a better idea of how to go about it. Personally, I think there’s a big disconnect between the courses and the core activities which we’re supposed to be doing. Perhaps for Books 2 and 4, we can practice by visiting a concurrent Book 1’s participants and doing deepenings and stories with them. That way, we can get our practice done and at the same time, reinforce the whole thing for those just starting out in the process… to make the connection with skill building early on.

I know that doing the practices is important, but the tutors are going to need a bit of help. For one thing, the RTI should really make sure that every study circle talks about the practices and learnings. There should be an emphasis on the learnings so far…that home visits are very relevant here in the U.S. and DC. Also, the Book 2 tutors need to know who new believers are and can then call on them to do deepenings and visits… perhaps the Assembly can put this together for us? Plus, it’s difficult to get anyone to teach children’s classes and even after taking the course, Book 3 grads are still reluctant. A child focused culture needs to be developed. One thing that my friend is doing is to set up times for the Book 3 participants to meet with the children and do one activity with them… of course, this is after the participants get all silly and comfortable with the activity inside their study circle! Or they could ask families with small children if they could do a lesson. Heck, just go to a friend, ask if they’ll be your ‘guinea pig’ for the practice, and do it. A friend of mine at work was happy to help out… people like to help you with your homework. Or even pick a Bahá’í friend.

You know, it really is so important that we have solid Book 1 trainings. Everything else in the sequence and then the core activities that come later on depend on that foundation. We need to really focus on the quality of our devotional gatherings, so it’s not just a bunch of Holy books on the table, but that the friends can really engage in their prayers and meditations, and that they’re regular and ongoing. In my Book 1 next week, I’ll be having the participants brainstorm the possible components of a devotional gathering – audience, theme, venue, arts, who to invite – they’ll go home and plan one, and then the group will choose one to implement as a study circle. Or, tutors could contact the host for the Sunday morning devotions at the Bahá’í center and participants could share prayers there.

Basically, I think we as tutors need to know what practice opportunities are available. I know we aren’t supposed to become a committee or anything, but to know what are one-time things...
that we can do which will help fulfill the practice components. It’s important that we’re not isolated little study groups, but that we reach out and make some human contact, maybe even collaborate with other study circles, committees, or even non-profits out in the community.

This whole thing about collaborating is really important. Those of us here today need to call up and bring the tutors, or folks who have studied Book 7 but aren’t facilitating, to the tutor encounters. To be honest, only those who are currently tutoring really want to come … it’s based on what they recognize they need. They won’t take advantage of the encounters and tools until they’re already facilitating and reflecting. So, we’ve got to have this networking going on, supporting initiatives, pledge to do activities together and getting more folks involved, sharing learnings between study circles… that kind of stuff.”

Anthony – Male, European American, 50, 1 book left to complete, Baltimore Cluster
Dotty – Female, African American, 55, sequence complete, Baltimore Cluster

Anthony – “I agree that the doing the practices is important and that after learning that they exist, I think that we’re now in a phase of figuring out how to implement them. Last winter, I went to a Book 1 refresher and it was good to be reminded of what needs to be done for the course. When I start my next study circle, the participants will need to have the opportunity to practice the practices, so that way they’ll better understand the whole process.”

Dotty – “Maybe we can ask the participants themselves how they would like to incorporate the practices into the course? For that, it will be important to have the practice done during the study circle time so that participants can reflect on it throughout the course’s study. We should definitely make the skill building evident from the start.”

Anthony – “When I took my courses, most were done intensively and we didn’t do any of the practices. Ever since we did that skit at the last encounter, I guess I’m really noticing now that I never got a chance to do them. In the future, they should be well planned with skill activities built in. We should also be educating the communities as to what the practices are, and what the process is all about, so they know. Also, a lot of folks over 35 don’t like to memorize. They say it’s like brainwashing.”

Dotty – “For me, memorization leads to my internalizing the quote. There are some that I memorized from Book 1 that are with me and just come out when I’m speaking. It’s really helped to shape my thinking in a positive way and better ground my actions so that the ‘insistent-self’ doesn’t get in the way.”

Anthony – “Personally, I’d like to do a 1 month preparation before I teach my next book, in order to make it challenging because one of our larger issues is really how to more effectively facilitate. With the participants, you really have to be creative with the opportunities, letting them know how to make the practices a reality… so for a tutor a prior working knowledge is important. The study circle is a good place for this where we can practice with each other and share our experiences. So as we gain the experience as tutors, we’ll better know the books and how to go about doing the practices.”
**Dotty** – “I know that when I’ve done the practice repeatedly, I’ve understood their importance much better, they’re almost self-evident. Perhaps we can bring a ‘specialist’ to the study circle to help the participants understand ways of doing the practices.”

**Anthony** – “However we do it, it would be helpful if the area coordinator encouraged the tutors to plan those opportunities for the participants to practice, reminding them that it’s important to do. With all this talk about expansion, we’re definitely going to need the resources to consolidate the community as more people come into the Faith.”

**Quantitative Data**
The quantitative data, gathered using the questionnaire, is as follows:

By the nature of the study and selection of participants, all of the 37 study participants are involved in the institute process, whether out of obedience or desire. In contrast to the total Bahá’í population in the studied geographic area, 118 of 289 (41%) in Baltimore cluster and 79 of 168 (47%) in Washington, DC cluster are involved in Ruhi Institute programs, having taken 1 or more courses (Personal data files).

Of the study’s participants, 22 of 37 (59%) completed the sequence. In the general Bahá’í population, 19 of 289 (7%) in the Baltimore cluster and 19 of 168 (11%) in the Washington, DC cluster had completed the sequence.

As participants took their courses, it was generally known that while some did the practices, many did not. The following (Table 1: Percent with Practice) is a composite breakdown of the courses that the questionnaire participants studied with percentages of those who have also done the associated practices at some point during or after the course was given. Some participants had done unrelated activities as the ‘practice’. These are not counted. (The practices are defined as being those explicitly listed and/or implied in the course books.)
Table 1: Percent with Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Percent that did practice</th>
<th>Practices defined – doing combination of one or more of listed activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
<td>41% (14 of 34)</td>
<td>Devotional activity, sharing prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 2</td>
<td>28% (9 of 32)</td>
<td>Home visits, Deepenings, Introducing Bahá’í concepts into conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 3</td>
<td>43% (10 of 23)</td>
<td>Conducting children’s class activities – lead stories, games, prayers, singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 4</td>
<td>48% (15 of 31)</td>
<td>Taught history to another, Made presentation of an episode, Shared story with another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 6</td>
<td>46% (11 of 24)</td>
<td>Taught Faith to another, Designed/took part in individual or collective teaching plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 7</td>
<td>71% (20 of 28)</td>
<td>Facilitate a Ruhi course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In looking for patterns of how the courses were conducted, participants that did in fact do the practices (approximately half), were then asked when they had completed the practices for each course – choosing between beginning, middle, end, throughout, or after the course. Some participants responded with multiple answers, and others were not able to recall. Of the 79 responses, 52 (66%) showed that practices were completed either at the end (17 or 22%) or after the course had already finished (35 or 44%).

Table 2: Increased Desire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
<td>27 (84%)</td>
<td>5 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 2</td>
<td>26 (87%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 3</td>
<td>20 (91%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 4</td>
<td>28 (90%)</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 6</td>
<td>22 (96%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 7</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Increased Desire.

Participants were asked if after having taken each course, they had an increased desire to be of service. Responses are as follows in Table 2: Increased Desire.

Table 3: Increased Ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
<td>22 (69%)</td>
<td>10 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 2</td>
<td>23 (74%)</td>
<td>8 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 3</td>
<td>22 (96%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 4</td>
<td>24 (77%)</td>
<td>7 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 6</td>
<td>20 (91%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book 7</td>
<td>27 (96%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Increased Ability.

Participants were asked if after having taken each course, they had an increased ability to be of service. Responses are as follows in Table 3: Increased Ability.
It is important also to reflect on the number of core activities that have been generated as a result of the increased desire and ability to be of service. In the three months preceding this study, Baltimore cluster had approximately 34 organized and regular core activities being conducted, while Washington, DC cluster had approximately 18 core activities (See Table 4: Current Activity Level). Some of these activities were carried out by individuals who participated in the study, while others were not (Personal data files).

Looking at the study’s 34 participants’ self-defined employment of newly learned skills, only 1 respondent (3%) indicated that they were not doing anything for which they had been trained.

Table 5: Tutor Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Tutor Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Helped plan activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Found opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When course participants were asked which actions by tutors were helpful in identifying opportunities to conduct the practices, 21 responded to the open-answer question as follows in Table 5: Tutor Actions.

The study’s participants were asked to reflect on their own qualities as learners and to identify, for those skills they did not feel comfortable doing, what was lacking as they took part in the corresponding courses. Of the 23 who responded, 10 (43%) stated
that they needed to take greater ownership of their learning, while 6 (26%) said they needed to push through personal discomfights.

To determine how many of the study’s participants were attending cluster reflection gatherings\textsuperscript{11} (and thereby engaging in further opportunities to reflect on the process of growth), participants were asked if they attended the gatherings and when they had last gone. 30 (88%) of 34 respondents attended at least one or two gatherings within the last 6 months.

When asked if building skills in the Ruhi courses is important, all 34 of the questionnaire respondents indicated, that yes, it is. Of the 30 who went on to say why, 19 (63%) had a purposive understanding, 5 (17%) had a vague understanding, 6 (20%) had a circular understanding. Examples of each include:

- \textbf{Purposive} – “Skills create a wealth of human resources that can benefit the community.”
- \textbf{Vague} – “Practical learning.”
- \textbf{Circular} – “It’s a safe place to practice on each other and share our experiences.”

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
Tally & Responses \\
\hline
12 & Human Resources \\
3 & Facilitate Outreach \\
13 & Increase Activity \\
7 & Obedience \\
14 & Increase Teaching \\
4 & Build Skills \\
\hline
6 & \textit{circular understanding} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Reasons Engaged in Courses}
\end{table}

In an open response format, tutors were asked to list reasons why we are engaged in conducting the Ruhi courses. The 25 responses were categorized and noted for circular understandings. The results are as follows in \textit{Table}

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Cluster reflection gatherings’ are periodically held gatherings designed to provide opportunity for Baha’i’s in a defined geographic area (or ‘cluster’) to reflect on issues, consider adjustments to their expansion and consolidation plans, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought.
6: Reasons Engaged in Courses.\textsuperscript{12}

When asked if knowing what other study circles did to practice their skills would be helpful for them as tutors, 24 of 24 respondents marked “yes”. To this same question, 17 respondents indicated how they would like the information communicated. Top three responses (given in an open format) were as follows in Table 7: Preferred Sharing Methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Preferred sharing methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>By email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>At tutor encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>By newsletter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tutors in active Learning**

Of the 20 tutors who have facilitated or are facilitating, 6 (30\%) said that when they were course participants, *encouragement* by their facilitator was helpful for completing the practices. 6 tutors (30\%) said their tutors’ *finding opportunities* for them to practice their skills was also helpful. When asked what their tutor *could have done* to help develop skills (in areas where the student feels weak), 5 tutors (25\%) said, *setting up opportunities to practice skills*.

Of this same group, 1 tutor (5\%) named *encouragement* as a quality to emulate in their courses. 6 tutors (30\%) said *finding opportunities* would help them better enable participants to practice their skills for each book. 4 tutors (20\%) stated that *doing the practices for themselves* will improve their quality as a tutor. Finally, 7 of 16 tutors

\textsuperscript{12} A circular understanding was noted when there appeared to be an emphasis on obedience with few or no other reasons, and/or repeating “Bahá’í jargon” with seemingly little other understanding when viewed in light of other responses by the participant in the questionnaire.
(44%) said that area coordinators could better aid tutors by helping them to find opportunities to practice the skills for each book.

Of the 6 who said their tutors found opportunities for them, and the 6 who felt that their finding opportunities for their participants would be good, only 1 participant both benefited from this action and then recognized that it was one to emulate as they facilitate.

Finally, tutors were asked to reflect on their needs and to indicate which of the following would be useful to them, if any. The responses of the 23 individuals who replied are in Table 8: Tutor Development Requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Tutor Development Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Tutor newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Having opportunities to do the practices for yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Increased visits to study circles by area coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>More training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Deepening on the documents of the Five Year Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Regular tutor encounters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

To adequately answer the research question – How can coordinators and tutors better facilitate the training process to ensure that the curriculum’s skill building activities are implemented? – it would be useful to look at the broader context in which we are working and then to focus on key aspects of that context and their significance.
Components Relating to Stages of Functional Unity

As we initially looked at the data, it became evident that different participants were engaging in different levels of learning. Looking at the two qualitative data sets gathered from the focus groups, we see that the Baltimore discussion generally revolved around the acceptance that the practices are an important component of the training and understanding the role of individual engagement in the process. In the Washington, DC discussion however, it was generally taken for granted that the individual was involved with trying the practices and rather, the dialogue was more focused on initiating collaborative relationships for generating practice opportunities. Whereas participants in Baltimore had limited, if any experience doing the practices in the courses, participants in Washington, DC exhibited their working knowledge of the practices through detailed descriptions of what was being tried. Based upon this reflection and action, DC participants identified concrete issues that need to be addressed and are beginning the process of creatively designing measures for addressing those issues.

Understanding that each cluster is on its own path, one which is dependent on the action and reflection of the individuals and communities living therein, we were able to identify certain components of the development process of the individual in his or her own path of transformation. Initially, participants were engaged in a conscious posture of learning, in which they were gaining a gradual awareness of themselves as entities spiritually dependent on interaction with others. At the same time, participants introspectively looked at their own characteristics as servants and reflected on the measures needed to develop their ability to be of service. The next level evidenced was where participants were consciously engaged in systematic interaction: as individuals
they contributed, shared and began to collaborate with others in particular lines of action. While evidence was limited, there were some glimmers of collective action starting to happen, indicating the future nature of the clusters’ dynamics as individual initiative gains momentum and coherence.

Recalling the metaphor of the relationship between cells, organs and the body, the process exhibited in the data is comparable – the cell first recognizes that it is a cell and begins to understand the spiritual dimensions necessary for its own growth. It then gradually sees that such growth is dependent upon its contributions to the organ and then collaborates with other cells to that end. From this pattern, we would then assume that as systems and processes are harmonized, the cells are able to contribute functionally and critically to the advancement of the whole body of humankind. The characteristics of increasing levels of functional unity will not become evident however, until the processes in the lower levels are firmly established and the capacity of the individuals and their communities develops to be able to name and address issues at the higher levels. *Figure 2: Stages of Functional Unity* illustrates the characteristics of each level.
Level 1: Conscious posture of learning

The first level – where the individual recognizes their ability and desire to serve – is characterized by a conscious posture of learning. In the focus groups, comments indicated that this posture was a result of engaging in action and reflection. For example, tutor encounters, which serve as opportunities for the facilitators to reflect and learn, are only deemed important by those who are actively engaged in tutoring, face challenges, and wish to strengthen their facilitation abilities. Other individuals who have taken Book
7, but have not facilitated courses are much less likely to attend, as was observed by the Washington, DC group.

Going back to the introductory sections of each course book and the supplementary materials, we saw that developing a conscious posture of learning through action and reflection is one of the fundamental aims of this series of courses. While future sequences, still in development, will focus on collaboration and collective action, this first series of seven books focuses on fostering individual initiative.

Finally, to ensure that the posture of learning is developed, because it is the spiritual basis for collective action at higher levels, both groups underscored the imperative for tutors and area coordinators to structure a learning environment conducive to such action and reflection and to take tangible steps toward making this a reality.

**Intra-Personal – recognizing oneself as a servant**

**Quality**

At the intra-personal sub-level – where tutors reflected on their inner qualities as servants – two categories were noticed, the first being that of their quality as collaborators in education as simultaneous facilitators/participants (similar to Freire’s description of the teacher-student). We saw that few tutors were making the connection between what they learned and observed and then consciously adapting that to their own service activities. While some tutors said that as participants, encouragement by their tutor was helpful for them to practice their skills, there was only one individual who, according to the data, apparently made the connection of seeing what their tutor did and realized that they too should actively encourage others.
However, in looking at the data, it was realized that participants were possibly defining encouragement differently. Some recognized encouragement as verbal affirmation, while others perhaps thought it to be an action, such as setting up an opportunity or process for the participant to strive and succeed. Realizing that simple verbal affirmations alone are insufficient for developing skills, many more tutors stated that they should find opportunities for participant service, than ‘encourage’ explicitly.

Other instances of introspection on oneself as a tutor were exhibited by participants indicating that they were now realizing that a prior working knowledge of what they were trying to train others in was important – doing the skill activity as a participant before asking others to do that same activity – and that such experiential understanding would help them better guide others in their own learning.

**Experience**

The impact of experience and action on the person’s development was also noticed as a balance to the reflection on quality. Participants are gradually understanding the impact that this has on their reflective processes, exhibited by comments such as “to facilitate helps to better learn the books and to know the practices intimately” and “to have the opportunity to do the practices leads to understanding” – that to do the practice helps one understand its relevancy for their own and their community’s development. The importance of such an awareness should be noted: these individuals are being given an opportunity to gain the understanding and ability to engage as participants in community definition and development.
Personal – acting as a servant

Quality

As we were able to see other qualities of servitude in the data that were related to a posture of learning, we felt that, while they are closely related, there were distinctions between them as the individual began looking around, outwardly, while being mindful of the introspective process. In this case, at the personal sub-level, the individual recognizes him or herself as a servant and begins applying their energies toward helping where they recognize need.

As individuals begin to engage in the various activities, they develop a desire for increasing the quality of those activities, seen in participants’ discussion on how to improve courses, better train individuals in conducting devotional activities, and changing the culture of the community to be more child focused. Simply looking at the amount and diversity of activity that the study’s participants were engaged in, only 1 of 34 respondents indicated that they were not doing anything for which they were trained. Yet this only speaks to those activities on which the Ruhi Institute touches. Clearly there are even more not accounted for, such as supporting, hosting and taking part in the courses, which enables others to also engage in the courses.

Many participants also realized, when questioned, that how they approached the training process impacted the quality of the course and how they would benefit from it. Between taking greater ownership of their own learning and pushing through personal discomforts, one could ask what prevents a person from being able to take this step.

One possible answer would be if the course were ‘facilitated’ in a manner closer to the “banking approach” to education, to which some tutors and participants in the
United States are initially conditioned: as active dispensers and passive recipients of knowledge. We are finding however, that the process of facilitation and learning is maturing. Individuals from this background who are used to ‘owning’ and ‘distributing’ information are learning to let go of their need to feel superior and engage from a more humble position, while those who were accustomed to always receiving are taking the empowering steps toward generating their own knowledge and contributing to the processes of group development.

**Attitude**

A noticeable feature in the data was the attitude of participants toward the development processes. The participant sample of individuals who are engaged in the institute process should be looked at in the context of the total involvement of the Bahá’í populations in the Baltimore and Washington, DC clusters: 41% and 47% respectively. Whether out of obedience or desire, such a number of individuals willing to engage in the still experimental process is very encouraging and indicates a relatively positive attitude toward this system of learning, particularly considering that it is completely voluntary.

Furthermore, within the courses themselves, we saw a steady increase in the desire to be of service as participants proceeded through the courses. 84% stated that after the first course, they had an increased desire to be of service, while after the final course, it was up to 96%. We could then assume that as participants learned more through the course material, there was indeed a significant impact on one’s orientation toward service. No doubt the structured process played a role in systematically increasing the understanding of the nature of growth and service. It should however, be noted that few
participants did the courses sequentially, as they were designed. Thus, as more individuals participate, moving from one course to the next, the impact on the desire to serve should be even greater.

**Skill ability**

One of the main outcomes of the Ruhi courses is to develop a person’s skills, so they may effectively contribute to the development of their community. While the strength of those skills was not explicitly measured in the study, participants were asked if they felt they had an increased ability to be of service. Responses ranged from 69% for the first book to 96% for the third and seventh books. (It seems reasonable that the percentage for the first is lower, given that there is more focus on developing an orientation toward serving than on building skills, which come in later courses, after the conceptual foundation is laid.) However, with only 74% and 77% saying they had gained the skills of doing deepenings and home visits in Book 2 and recounting the histories of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh in Book 4, this does indicate a need to increase our efforts to do the practices.

When we compare these moderate levels of increased skill ability with the increase in the number of individuals inspired to conduct core activities, there seems to be some correlation. Between Baltimore and Washington, DC clusters, there were a total of 52 core activities (devotional gatherings, children’s classes, and study circles) being conducted during the three months prior to the study. Most of these activities are being conducted by the same participants of this study, though some are not. Looking at the number of ‘active’ tutors who responded (20) there were 24 study circles, a heartening
statistic. However, looking at the total number of Book 7 trained individuals between the
two clusters (64), it is seen that only 38% of the potential capacity is being utilized.
Obviously, not everyone who is trained will find their talents in facilitating or teaching
children’s classes, yet it still remains that the training is leading to increased activity by
individuals.

It should be appreciated that efforts to this end have influenced participants’
understanding of the Ruhi courses. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, all
agreed that building skills was important and 67% had a fairly comprehensive
understanding that movement through the courses was a step toward generating initiators
of service action and resources for the community’s development. Indeed, several were
thinking of how they could advance that process further and faster as they brainstormed
ways of integrating the practices with local community needs. Yet, other participants
simply knew that doing the practices and having skills were important without tangibly
understanding why – (“[The study circle] is a safe place to practice on each other and
share our experiences.”) In one person’s response, they noted that having a clear
understanding of why they were going through the courses, if only a conceptual one, was
critical. If a significant percentage of tutors (33%) is unclear, then this will have a
definite impact on the course participants’ understanding.

Because the participants in this study were allowed to define for themselves
whether or not they had increased ability, we should compare that number (between 69%
and 96%) with those who actually did the practices (between 28% and 71%). We can see
that some skill ability was likely attained simply by reading about it in the course manual
or perhaps through role-playing within the study circle. This is a helpful step, but not
sufficient. To borrow a metaphor from one of the counsellors, reading a book about swimming and actually jumping in the pool are very different. Each has its purpose, but without the experiential practice, the theoretical understanding will not produce an expert, or even mediocre swimmer (E. Andrews, personal communication, May 13, 2005). Thus, as tutors gain a better understanding of why and how the practices are done, through the experience of doing them, we will start seeing a more comparable rise in the core activities as individuals are trained.

**Critical Mass**

As experience was gained around the world, the International Teaching Centre observed that in areas where a significant number of individuals had completed the sequence of courses, there was a spike in the level of learning and enthusiasm and the number of core activities “increased at a seemingly exponential rate” (2003a, p10). Subsequent discussions identified this ‘critical mass’ to be roughly 50 individuals in a cluster. While neither population in Baltimore, nor Washington, DC have yet attained this critical mass, they are both moving toward that goal with 7% and 11% respectively having completed the sequence as of early May, 2005. Additionally, current statistics and trends indicate that this number has the possibility of doubling within the next several months (Personal data files).

Looking at this study’s participants, 59% completed the sequence of courses. As was mentioned earlier, completing the sequence has bearing on the individual’s understanding of the processes of and ability to aid in the transformation of the community. While such a percentage is encouraging, it should be evaluated in context
with the strength of those resources. Only 28% of the study’s participants who studied 
Book 2 practiced and gained the skills of conducting home visits and studying the 
Writings with others. For Books 1, 3, 4, and 6, between 41% and 48% of the participants 
who took these courses practiced and gained the skills of sharing prayers with others, 
teaching children’s classes, leading activities, doing story telling, inviting others to 
activities, etc. At most, 71% of the sample which had taken Book 7 had facilitated a study 
circle. Furthermore, the majority of individuals who did do the practices, in fact did them 
at the end or after having taken the course. Unless they took the course again (which 
some do), participants are much less likely to have the structured opportunity to reflect on 
the experience in light of the course material, thereby curtailing the learning that would 
come from the action / reflection process.

In Ruhi Book 3, in a section on leading activities, it is mentioned that having a 
common goal, understood and supported by all, is essential (1995b, p30). In their 
discussion, the focus group participants emphasized this point, stating that for there to be 
a strong critical mass, or any meaningful institute activity for that matter, there needs to 
be more education of the communities as to what the training process is about and more 
specifically, what the practices are. Only when this understanding exists and the 
community members are taking part in the action and reflection, will other initiatives – 
such as designing tools for enhancing the process – be useful. Such statements lead to an 
important learning: By and large, only those who are engaged have the experiential 
understanding necessary for reflection and can thereby effectively contribute to 
conscious growth and development. Evidence in support of this exists elsewhere: At 
reflection gatherings, first time attendees who have not taken part in core activities often
contribute comments and suggest initiatives based not on a culture of systematic learning through a process of study, action and reflection, but on an older culture based on holding events isolated from systematic evaluation, from which the community is transitioning. Furthermore, the National and Regional institutions in the United States have encouraged Local Spiritual Assembly members to go through the sequence of courses not just as individuals, but as an institution as well (National Spiritual Assembly, 2004). This suggestion is in part due to the higher level institutions having done likewise and seen the value it holds in understanding the processes and enhancing their ability to nurture and lead the community’s development. Thus, as individuals and institutions gain greater understanding through careful study, action and reflection, the critical mass needed for engaging in increasingly intensive processes of growth and consolidation will be available.

**Awareness**

One of the chief indicators of a developing critical consciousness is a growing awareness – about one’s interrelation with others, about the processes being enacted, about the roles one plays and the contributions to be made. It was encouraging to see that the vast majority, 88% of the study’s participants, had attended the most recent one or two cluster reflection gatherings in their area. This is consonant with the learning that those who are engaged (in this case, taking active part in the training institute process) see reason to reflect for the refinement and strengthening of endeavor.

Tutors were asked to list the reasons why we are conducting the Ruhi courses, in order to see what kind of understanding they had regarding the purpose of the training
endeavor. The majority indicated that it was for human resource development and increased activity, but for some, obedience was also a reason. As indicated earlier, if the individual is to exhibit movement from one level of consciousness to the next, obedience needs to be accompanied with other reasons that exhibit understanding, drawing on experience, study and thoughtful reflection. It is then that they will be motivated to engage in “a new paradigm of action” – first on their own and then collectively – which will impact change in their social environments.

**Level 2: Conscious systematic interaction**

While many of the study’s participants were still exploring their nature as servants and beginning to address personal obstacles to taking individual initiative, others had begun turning their focus onto how they could more systematically serve others individually and collectively. These participants understood that for the community to grow, a simultaneous undertaking of consolidation had to be in place (training new Bahá’ís how to contribute to community activities), and that the sequence of courses was the primary training tool for both these aspects of community development – that the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through the courses were designed to foster systematic interaction and nurturing among community members.

**Personal – taking strategic initiative**

**Collaboration**

Several participants from the Washington, DC focus group identified a need to collaborate on initiatives. As individual tutors, they could set up opportunities with tutors
of other courses to have their study circle participants visit each other to do the practices. First, this would help one group build skills. Second, the host group would then experience and appreciate the benefits of having the practices done and begin to make connections between course study and practice early in the institute process. By collaborating or networking, tutors (or those engaged in other development activities) can support each other, pledge initiatives together\textsuperscript{13}, and begin the requisite dynamic building for collective action.

**Sharing learnings**

One of the benefits of networking, as the tutor encounters and cluster reflection gatherings are designed to encourage, is the opportunity to share learnings. The study’s participants overwhelmingly felt that it would be helpful to share learnings between study circles. Ideas for sharing information and learnings that were collected in the questionnaire ranged from using a tutor email listserv, sharing stories of how practices have been implemented in particular courses, using video to document effective practices, and having a tutor newsletter. The main methods preferred for communicating this information were by emailed newsletter and at tutor encounters.

As these tutors identify the need to share, they will develop a greater appreciation for those materials which are currently being produced for that precise reason. Published by the Regional Bahá’í Council of the Southern States, *Learning About Growth* and *Southern Breeze* are two periodic newsletters documenting the practices and experimentation in expansion and consolidation activity in the southern United States.

\textsuperscript{13} To pledge an initiative refers to making a short-term commitment to initiate or take part in any given number of activities associated with community growth, often made at the periodic cluster reflection gathering.
The International Teaching Centre disseminates the periodic document *Reflections on Growth*, in addition to more substantial letters, documents and videos. Also at the international level, the independent website RuhiResources.org serves as a clearing house for tutor and coordinator tips, activity ideas, sample newsletters, and guidance information. In other regional training institutes’ areas, tutor and RTI newsletters are written at the grassroots level. Thus, for those who want to know what others have done in a particular instance, the information probably exists. However, particularly for those in this area, taking the time to read and find that documentation, even when it is sent to them, is difficult. Making time for such review and learning at the tutor encounter could then be useful.

**Tutor actions**

In Book 7, where participants learn the dynamics of facilitating Ruhi courses, it is mentioned that “Opportunities need to be created for [participants] to put the skills they are acquiring into practice” (2001, p80). In both the questionnaire and the focus group, suggestions for tutor improvement repeatedly revolved around the tutors finding opportunities for participants to conduct the practices.

Because few actually have the experience of doing the practices and even fewer have facilitated practices, many responses suggested that doing the practices was important, but lacked an understanding of how to facilitate them. Some responses were quite passive: looking to the participant and asking how they would like to do the practices – or authoritative: letting participants know how to make the practices a reality, or to bring a ‘specialist’ to the study circle. Neither of these approaches fully addresses
the issue from the necessary nurturing posture – not leaving the participant to their own devices (unless they express desire for the challenge), nor assuming participants will simply absorb what they are told. It also raises the question of whether personal oppressions are still very much at work. On one extreme, tutors who come from traditionally oppressed backgrounds (or also ‘reformed oppressors’), would, in an effort not to oppress others, leave participants to explore and do the practices in a relativistic manner, which usually results in the participant, who has never done the practices, feeling clueless and uninspired. This leads to some discussion but no action. On the other hand, those who have habitually defined the world and led the manner and direction in which action is taken, would facilitate practices in a way that stifles creativity and leaves the participant with either the assumption that there is only one way in which an action can be carried out or a distaste and fortified personal barrier against trying a new activity. Regardless of which extreme we may be coming from, our aim and the point of our exploration needs to be to nurture, to assist each other’s growth in service. Grappling with how to strike this balance seems to be the essence of where many of us are as facilitators: we realize that leaving the participants to do the practice is insufficient, yet we have had our fill of being told in times past what is proper ministerial and theological etiquette. While setting up an opportunity for the participant to practice may at first seem like ‘doing the practice for them’ and stifling their own power to initiate, the chance to engage in the experience itself is where some of the first liberation takes place, pushing past inhibitions to doing the act. As participants move on, having had the experience within a structured learning environment, the options to explore the myriad dynamic and
cultural approaches to holding children’s classes, telling stories, or conducting devotional activities, will be wide open before them.

**Area coordinator actions**

Since coordinators will find themselves in similar situations, for they too facilitate, efforts to encourage the conduct of practices have generally followed a similar path: giving verbal encouragement to the tutors that they need to conduct the practices themselves, reminding them that practices are important, etc. Nurturing is not yet widespread, though some steps are being taken: occasional (but certainly not regular) visits to study circles or reflection gatherings, one or two initiatives to give tutors the opportunity to do the practices themselves, and phone calls to check in with progress. While acknowledging time constraints, coordinators will also need to find the nurturing balance between oppressive mandating and passivity, which result in inaction or little experiential learning.

**Inter-Personal – moving in the direction of unified action**

For those tutors who were comfortable serving and regularly engaged in individual initiative, their attentions are now turned toward collective action. While their personal actions maintained the dynamics of the development process, the focus turns increasingly to asking: What can *we* do? Or, how can *we* enhance our collective learning? Such questions indicate the readiness to appreciate reflection gatherings, which have been called the “learning matrix of the clusters” (International Teaching Center, 2003a, p. 17). Such periodically held gatherings are designed to provide opportunity for Bahá’ís to
“reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought” (Universal House of Justice, 2001b, p. 5). Until this point, however, because few individuals were engaged in the core activities or were familiar with the processes of organic development, the actual attendance at these gatherings, as well as their utility, have been limited. Gatherings were held and attended out of obedience, but it has only been within the first few months of 2005 that an institutional learning has been built up around how to hold the gatherings – proving to be a learning process in itself. As individuals in the area become more engaged, their enthusiasm for service will increase and the gatherings, now established, will take on their true character as opportunities for collective reflection and short term planning.

The dynamics and components of systematic interaction, as a popular and collective experience, are now being explored by many for the first time. In some respects, one might say that this is the first time such an endeavor has been possible on such a wide scale. In its document, The Institution of the Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice stated that in the Bahá’í community, “the power to act… resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. This power is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and at the level of collective volition” (p. 11). That which is structurally possible at whatever level, a result of the act of using collective will (achievable only in unity), is thereby dependent first on the initiative of the individual. In other parts of the nation and world, it was observed that early in cluster development, emphasis was generally placed on individual initiative. At this stage, the role of the Local Spiritual Assembly and associated institutions was to “encourage and facilitate the ‘spirit of enterprise’ that results in an ever-growing number of core activities” (International
Teaching Center, 2004, p. 3). Later it was seen that “as clusters develop, those individual initiatives often become systematized in collective endeavors”, eventually leading to increased institutional planning, sustained by simultaneous individual initiative (p. 3). Thus, as individual transformation takes place, the person engages with their environment, effecting with others deliberate changes in the structures of society through collaborative action and reflection.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Directions and Actions for Facilitating Growth

With an increased understanding of the dynamics fostering critical awareness and individual initiative, the task for tutors and coordinators is to serve as catalysts of this process, in terms of both their personal example and their relations with others. To start, having the experience of doing the practices for oneself is essential. As experience is gained, engaging in the sharing and reflecting at tutor encounters and reflection gatherings will bring understanding of what we are trying to accomplish and its significance. Tutors can then organize with and for others in the study circle opportunities to do those same practices. Through this process, they will be able to better define and collaboratively seek means for addressing their developmental needs.

As tutors facilitate, it should be in a manner that encourages others to take ownership of their growth. What this implies, in part, is to let the Ruhi curriculum work as it was designed, with personal engagement and for courses to be studied sequentially. In a posture of humility, we need to allow participants to make their own connections
with the Holy Word without the interference of the tutor’s interpretation since consciousness is not something imposed, but nurtured.

In addition, coordinators serving at the cluster and regional levels will need to facilitate the process of sharing learnings between tutors and clusters, by seeing that newsletters are established, making sure that tutor encounters are regular and that there is ample and structured time for tutors to participate in deepening on course materials and the current Plan, sharing, reflecting, and planning.

Because it is the coordinators’ responsibility to see that tutors are nurtured in their new line of service, creating opportunities for those who have not yet done the practices is important and best done before the tutor begins facilitating a course. Part of this nurturing, as an example of ‘walking with’, would be to visit periodically study circles within one’s area. This will better connect the coordinator with the learnings coming from participants as well as gauge the strengths and challenges the tutor is facing and to aid them in seeking solutions. Finally, maintaining regular communication will be essential. By email, telephone, and in person, collaborative learning will only take place if channels for the flow of information and love are increasingly opened and strengthened.

**Applicability**

It is our hope that the findings in this research will be of benefit first to those who are serving in the Baltimore and Washington, DC clusters. As participants took part in the questionnaire and the focus group discussion, this should have provided opportunity for some to engage in a serious reflection on what they are doing as facilitators, why they are
facilitating, and how they are going about the process. We have seen that as these
questions are posed and answered, we come to a greater understanding of the processes in
which we are engaged, and commit ourselves all the more resolutely.

Because the data is drawn from the sub-urban and urban American contexts, we
hope the findings will also be of use to others in the United States – whether in the
Crimson Ark region or other regional training institutes, in the southern states, or in the
nation as a whole. Obviously, the paths of each individual and cluster will take on their
own characteristics as they mature, but the spiritual dynamics seen will probably be
similar. The information written here will be offered and made available on the Crimson
Ark’s website (http://bci.org/crimsonark) to interested individuals and institutions for
their consideration and reflection.

**Recommendations for further research**

During the data analysis, it was realized that in our training for individual
initiative and collective action, while there was some action taking place, the unity and
understanding needed for us to work collectively and purposively was still in its earliest
formative stages and to outline it now would be premature. While some clusters in the
world are currently experimenting with this form of collective action, we are not yet, and
it remains to be explored as we garner the critical mass to take the process to the next
level. This would perhaps be the next step in the research of this theme.

Due to the limited scope of the research, many other themes could not be
explored. While time will invariably grant us a broader perspective, the full impact of
these courses on the world – theologically, educationally, socially, structurally – remains
to be seen. Taking part in the courses and their activities and then engaging in research on any of these themes would be beneficial toward gaining a better understanding of the processes involved.

As individuals are called to minister to each other, the roles of the institutions and those serving on its behalf are constantly being defined as we explore the implications of a new revelation. This revolutionary process has placed in the hands of the meek the responsibility of action, reflection and growth. It can be argued that no other religious institution or government is currently nurturing its people to such an extent. To witness and study such a process is truly an honor, yet this is the very process which Bahá’u’lláh and every preceding Manifestation, have repeatedly, with increasing intensity, bestowed upon those who would believe in Him. He wrote:

Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God’s universal Manifestations would be apparent (Kitáb-i-Íqán, 1932, p. 240).
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Appendix A - Consent Form and Participant Questionnaire

May 1, 2005

Dear Collaborator in the Ruhi Institute courses:

The time you have sacrificed to participate in the Ruhi courses and the learning you gained in the process is very much appreciated and important to the Crimson Ark Regional Training Institute (RTI). In an attempt to measure our effectiveness at training human resources through these courses, we have assembled a questionnaire to assist us in our learning process. We hope this will ultimately help us better implement the practice component of our trainings.

The information gathered in this questionnaire will first be used by the coordinators in the RTI. While this research is being conducted for the training institute, it is also for Jeffrey Clark’s graduate capstone research paper and presentation. Findings will be shared with the Bahá’í friends and Institutions of the Faith, as well as be formally documented and presented at the School for International Training in November, 2005 (Brattleboro, VT).

In all cases, information will be presented anonymously. Responding to this questionnaire is completely voluntary. There are no wrong answers to the questions. We simply look for your experiences and learnings. If you have any further questions about this research, you may contact Jeffrey Clark at 410.547.2662 or masaladust@hotmail.com

Following this form is the list of questions. If you agree to participate, please sign the bottom of this page. Then, take a few minutes to record your answers. When you finish, you may submit your responses to the tutor or coordinator (if conducted manually) or send the saved document by email to masaladust@hotmail.com. Again, we thank you for your participation in this learning process.

Sincerely,
The research team for Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC clusters
Shiva Akhavan
Jeffrey Clark
Ruth Enslow
Shirin Mohebbaty
Jose Uribe

I have read the above statements (or they have been read to me by a tutor or coordinator) and I agree to participate in the research. I understand that this is a completely voluntary activity and that I can refuse to answer any question.

Signature*    Date

Printed Name

*type name if submitted electronically.
All Collaborators
1. Which Ruhi courses have you studied? When?

   Year (approximate is ok)
   □ Book 1 ______
   □ Book 2 ______
   □ Book 3 ______
   □ Book 4 ______
   □ Book 6 ______
   □ Book 7 ______

2. For each book, did you conduct a practice? What was it?

   Book 1 __________________________________________________________
   Book 2 __________________________________________________________
   Book 3 __________________________________________________________
   Book 4 __________________________________________________________
   Book 6 __________________________________________________________
   Book 7 __________________________________________________________

3. For each book, did you learn a new skill? What was it?

   Book 1 __________________________________________________________
   Book 2 __________________________________________________________
   Book 3 __________________________________________________________
   Book 4 __________________________________________________________
   Book 6 __________________________________________________________
   Book 7 __________________________________________________________

4. Was the practice activity associated with the practices in that book?

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<td>Book 7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5. At what point during the course was the practice planned?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Throughout</th>
<th>After the course</th>
<th>Not planned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. At what point during the course was the practice completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Throughout</th>
<th>After the course</th>
<th>Not planned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. Upon completing the course, did you have an increased desire to be of service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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<td>Book 7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. Upon completing the course, did you have an increased ability to be of service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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<td>Book 7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. If called on, do you feel you could perform any of the skills for the books you studied? Which?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
10. After the course, did you do or are you now doing any of the skill activities for which you were trained? Which?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11. Had you conducted a similar practice before taking the course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Book 7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12. How active was your tutor in identifying opportunities for the practices?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book 1</td>
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</table>

What actions by the tutor did you find to be helpful?

________________________________________________________________________

13. For those books whose skills you do not feel comfortable performing:
   a. What could you have done to develop those skills?
      _____________________________________________________________________
      _____________________________________________________________________
   b. What could your tutor have done to help develop those skills?
      _____________________________________________________________________
      _____________________________________________________________________

14. Have you attended a cluster reflection gathering? When did you go most recently?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
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</table>
15. Are building skills in the Ruhi courses important? Why or why not?

  Yes  No

________________________________________________________________________

Additional comments you feel are important to mention:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

End

********************
(Tutors proceed)

Additional questions for tutors
1. Please list reasons why we are conducting the Ruhi courses:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. How soon after being trained in Book 7 did you conduct your first study circle?

________________________________________________________________________

3. Which books have you facilitated? How many times?
   Book 1    _______
   Book 2    _______
   Book 3    _______
   Book 4    _______
   Book 6    _______
   Book 7    _______

4. Did your participants conduct the practices for the particular books? Describe some.
   Book 1___________________________________________________________
   Book 2___________________________________________________________
   Book 3___________________________________________________________
   Book 4___________________________________________________________
   Book 6___________________________________________________________
   Book 7___________________________________________________________
5. How did you assist them or facilitate the process? For which books?

Book 1 __________________________________________________________
Book 2 __________________________________________________________
Book 3 __________________________________________________________
Book 4 __________________________________________________________
Book 6 __________________________________________________________
Book 7 __________________________________________________________

6. Did you use either the skill building sign-up sheets or the tutor strategies document recently produced by the Crimson Ark RTI? Why or why not? What was your experience with either of them? (Indicate for which book)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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________________________________________________________________________

7. Would knowing what other study circles did to practice their skills be helpful for you as a tutor?

Yes  No

If yes, how would you like that information communicated? ____________________

8. How could you as a tutor better enable participants to practice their skills for each book?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. How could your area coordinators better aid tutors and participants to practice the skills for each book?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10. Which of the following do you feel would be useful to you as a tutor:

☐ Tutor newsletter with tips and case studies
☐ Having opportunities to do the practices for yourself
☐ Increased visits to study circles by area coordinators
☐ More training
☐ Deepening on the documents of the Five Year Plan
☐ Regular tutor encounters
☐ Other?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Thank you again for your time to complete these questions.