

# THE SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF MALAYSIA

Incorporated under the Companies Act 1965, No. 18247-U

## **Education In Malaysia - A STATEMENT OF THE BAHÁ'I COMMUNITY OF MALAYSIA In conjunction with the Education System Review 2012**

14 July 2012

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### **I. Introduction**

The profound changes now shaping human affairs suggest that new models of life—far reaching in their capacity to release human potential—are within the grasp of a rapidly evolving global community. Advances in knowledge across an ever-expanding range of disciplines, the emergence of international mechanisms that promote collective decision-making and action, and the increasing ability of the masses of humankind to articulate their aspirations and needs, indicate a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet. To realize the promise offered by such changes, however, will require a searching re-examination of the prevailing patterns of social and economic development.

Because social advancement springs from the creation and dissemination of knowledge, a salient feature of development strategy over the past decades has been education. Initially, a focus on physical infrastructure evolved to include matters related to curriculum, administration, pedagogical training, educational technology, and the relationship between schools and their surrounding communities. Yet, despite notable achievements, especially in providing education on a universal basis, educational methodologies are, in the main, falling short of releasing and cultivating human potential. A fragmented approach towards accessing knowledge is resulting in a cumulative educational experience which does not allow students to see the essential relationships between different areas of human inquiry and social reality. This fragmentation is exacerbated by the emphasis placed on the absorption of facts rather than on the understanding of important concepts and processes. Moreover, issues relating to individual purpose and morality are rarely incorporated.

The existing situation calls for a fresh look at the entire corpus of human knowledge and how it can be studied and extended in a holistic fashion. Education should strive to develop an integrated set of capabilities—technical, artistic, social, moral and spiritual—so that individuals can lead lives with meaning and become agents of positive social change. It is in creating curricula and methodologies that foster such interrelated capabilities that will require an education system that responds to, and be governed by universal spiritual principles, without which material progress leads as much to misery as to happiness.

The experience of the Baha'i world community in the area of education in thousands of neighbourhoods around the world, is revealing a number of principles salient to refining the quality and learning outcomes of educational processes. These principles could serve as signposts in directing our endeavours in translating to reality the noble intentions enshrined in our National Education Philosophy.

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## **II. Analysis of Current Situation**

The National Education Philosophy refers to education in Malaysia as an on-going effort to produce citizens who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious; who have high moral standards, are knowledgeable and competent to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the society and the nation at large. For instance, the Cabinet Committee Report (1979), in its review of the National Education Philosophy, recommended that the pool of manpower for national development should not only be skilled and efficient but be able to think and act morally and ethically. In its essence, the National Education Philosophy aims to provide a holistic approach to education with an emphasis on the development of high moral character.

Despite the laudable efforts of policy-makers, there is a growing concern that education has been too focused on the cognitive domain at the expense of the affective domain, in particular the moral and spiritual aspects.

As one examines the influences shaping the minds of youth and adolescents today, it becomes readily apparent that the present approach to education has bred forces of passivity, materialism and a desire to be entertained among our young. Young people are perceived as mere receptacles of information incapable of deep thinking, resulting in a generation who lack critical thinking skills and the ability to generate new knowledge and apply it in socially beneficial ways.

There is also an over-emphasis to excel academically to meet economic needs and to join the elite where success is measured by material gains. As a result, competition instead of cooperation dominates, inculcating in children from an early age to be self-centred and to seek self-gratification rather than being generous and altruistic. Knowledge of acquired sciences is harnessed for the purpose of self-interest rather than for the promotion of the welfare of communities. Money, more than service has become a motivating factor to be successful in life. Many education programmes also appear to skew towards superficiality with a focus on fun and learning through play to the extent that the need to entertain and be entertained goes beyond childhood. The challenge now facing our nation in this new millennium is to find a balanced approach to educate and develop in our next generation those qualities and capabilities that will contribute to an ever-advancing civilization.

## **III. Vision of a Harmonious and Prosperous Society**

Education is an important and vital tool in promoting peace and unity in a country like Malaysia which is uniquely diversified in terms of race, culture and religion. It is a country without equal in the opportunities it has to demonstrate to an inexperienced world on how to live together in harmony.

As a start, communities and institutions must generate a vision of the kind of society they wish to live in and then consider the kind of individuals that will bring this about. The emergence of a peaceful and harmonious nation that is as diversified as Malaysia requires a vision that is founded on shared beliefs, culture and values. Such shared ideals result in the development of attitudes that foster constructive patterns of human

interactions and activities. True prosperity – a well-being founded on peace, unity, cooperation, altruism, dignity, rectitude of conduct and justice – flows from the light of spiritual awareness and acquisition of virtues as well as from material discovery and progress.

To achieve true prosperity in our nation, it is vital that our education system be geared to help the young recognise our similarities, our common interests and our common destiny rather than what divides us. Malaysia is capable of teaching the world how to live in peace and harmony and this is only possible when people in our communities are educated to take into account the spiritual principles and priorities that foster and promote the well-being of humanity as a whole.

Bahá'ís believe that human beings are inherently noble, and that the purpose of life is to cultivate such attributes, skills, virtues and qualities as will enable them to contribute their share towards the betterment of society and the building of an ever-advancing civilization. True education releases capacities, develops analytical abilities, confidence, will, and goal-setting competencies, and instils the vision that will enable individuals to become self-motivating change agents, serving the best interests of the community and the world at large. They should be skilled in the art of consultative decision making and empowered with a sense of their own dignity and worth. They should understand their positions as members of both a local community and the world community, and they must believe their lives can make a difference.

As such, formal education needs to go beyond the exclusive aim of helping young people to secure gainful employment. Educational processes should assist youth to recognize and express their potentialities while developing in them the capacity to contribute to the spiritual and material prosperity of humanity as a whole.

In considering the content of education, it is important to remember that the prejudices separating the peoples of the world and, at times, erupting into conflicts and wars are not just the result of ignorance but are sometimes the product of a biased education. The development of and adherence to a universal set of educational principles, based, perhaps, on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, could provide a unifying framework within which to cultivate an understanding of the diversity of human experience. The strength of such a framework will derive from its basis in the principle of the oneness of humanity.

#### **IV. Oneness of Humanity as the Axis of an Educational Process**

The Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humanity stems from the teaching that all humans have been created equal in the image of God, and that God does not make any distinction between people. The principle emphasizes the unity of humanity transcending all divisions of race, nation, gender, caste, and social class, while celebrating its diversity. The Bahá'í Writings states that since the human race is one unified organic unit, all people have the same basic capacities, and that the physical differences are superficial and do not make one group superior to another.

Thus, recognition and acceptance of the principle as the underlying axis of an educational process will make possible the cultivation of unity among the diverse elements of the human family, recognizing common human aspirations in the varied cultures, habits, and temperaments that exist in every country and throughout the world. The oneness of humanity and the universality of human rights should be taught in every classroom in the world, along with skills in consultation and conflict resolution.

Therefore, what the Baha'i Community is proposing underscores the noble aim of the National Education Philosophy. The development and implementation of a new process of education should address both the spiritual and material dimensions of humankind to imbue individuals with values that ensure enduring attitudes and collective behaviour for the construction of a peaceful and united society. The material aspects of community development – environment, economic and social policies; production, distribution, communication and transportation systems; and political, legal and scientific processes- has also to be driven by spiritual principles rather than largely determined by material considerations. Hence, the education system needs to pay more attention to moral and ethical motivation and the cultivation of attitudes that foster a desire to use knowledge for the common good.

Our challenge, therefore, is to redesign and develop our communities around universal spiritual principles such as love, honesty, justice, moderation, respect and humility which promote unity and integration, without which no community, no matter how economically prosperous, intellectually endowed or technologically advanced, can long endure.

## **V. Conclusion**

In essence, the education process is ultimately concerned with both the transformation of individuals and the social structures that the members of society create. The emergence of peaceful and progressive modes of living can only occur when a child acquires a vision that is world-embracing during the vital years of his education in school. Hence, education must directly address the inner life and character of individuals as well as the organization of society. Its purpose must be to promote a process of social change that engenders cooperation, compassion, rectitude of conduct, and justice—a transformation that permeates every aspect of the relationships that govern human activity. From this perspective, material advancement is properly understood not as an end in itself, but rather as a vehicle for moral, intellectual and social progress. Similarly, any meaningful enhancement of material well-being flows only from the concrete application of spiritual precepts such as equity, trustworthiness, and altruism.

While education prepares individuals for work, it should not be perceived as a mere factor of production. Work is both a means of livelihood for the individual and a way of contributing to the prosperity of the community as a whole. Work in the spirit of service, adds meaning to life and contributes towards the development of intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious individuals, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Meaningful individual and social transformation from the current education approach cannot come from political prescriptions or technical recipes alone.

Thus it is clear that investments made in education represents no less than an investment in the stability, security and prosperity of our nation. Education approaches and methods, guided by the needs and aspirations of respective communities, supported by families and social institutions and inspired by the awareness of the inestimable potential latent in every child will awaken in every individual not only their intellectual capabilities but also to their role as protagonists of change in their communities and in the world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EDUCATION

In applying the principles mentioned in the attached statement in a holistic manner in education to meet the needs and aims of the National Education Philosophy, the Baha’i Community would like to share their recommendations as an initial consideration for the implementation of a holistic approach to education in Malaysia. The proposal will focus on several of the 9 priority areas.

Priority Areas	Recommendations
1: Quality of Teachers	<p>Teachers are the un-lockers of the potential of the Nation, the shapers of the Nation and the determining factor in the provision of a quality education”. Therefore, teachers should cultivate the following attitudes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. View each student as inherently noble. The teacher must also see the nobility and capacity in each student, recognizing that a lack of opportunity is different from lack of capacity.</li> <li>2. Come to see the training and education of young minds as a noble undertaking.</li> <li>3. Be exemplary models of character in addition to being facilitators of knowledge. Teachers- their laudable profession has far too long been overlooked and underappreciated – must acknowledge that if they wish to enjoy the support of the community at large, they must embody and model the principles they teach.</li> <li>4. Not to view students as an empty vessel waiting to be filled but to enable each child to discover and develop their technical, artistic, social, moral and spiritual capabilities. In this regard, teacher education should give emphasis to the understanding of human nature and its implications for teachers.</li> <li>5. Relinquish the idea that they are fountains of all knowledge. Rather, they should form a partnership with their students in a shared learning process, demonstrating by their example that they, too, are learners. This can have a liberating effect on students in that it helps them see themselves as directors of their own learning and as individuals who can determine the course their lives will take.</li> </ol> <p><b>Implications for the selection of teachers:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selection of teachers should be more comprehensive, taking into account relevant attitudes, temperaments and aspects of character based on their involvement and contribution in school and community projects as well as their academic achievements.</li> <li>2. Similarly, the selection of teacher educators also requires scrutiny to ensure that the task of preparing the ‘shapers of the nation’ is entrusted to capable hands, with the right motivation and capabilities.</li> <li>3. Consider the necessity of raising up qualified teachers from within the local community. Such teachers have a clearer understanding of the social reality of the community that they are serving.</li> </ol> <p><b>Implications for Teacher-Training:</b></p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Introduction of subjects such as Moral Philosophy and Comparative Religions to provide teachers with a vision that is world-embracing to convey universal principles to guide students towards the aims and objectives of the National Education Philosophy.</li> <li>5. Emphasis on the study of the National Education philosophy as much as educational psychology to help define the problem of national education, analyse and clarify the issues involved, explain the ends and means of education, and reflect about education in a plural society such as ours. Only when teachers have a greater understanding of the National Philosophy of Education and are convinced of its soundness will they be able to translate it into practice and realize its aims.</li> <li>6. In addition to added emphasis on the national Philosophy of Education, teacher education programmes should also give emphasis to the understanding of the Rukun Negara and its implications for teachers. Ways and means must be devised at teacher institutes to produce teachers with a heightened consciousness about their role in fostering national unity and national cohesion. Furthermore, study of documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child and understanding their implications for teachers and teaching will help produce a more enlightened cohorts of teachers..</li> <li>7. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training curriculum be revised to give added emphasis in integrating values across the school curriculum and in using more effective pedagogy and assessment (rather than the present approach to the teaching and assessment of moral education) that will assist students to internalise and practice values such as love for humanity, safe guarding the dignity of fellow human beings, celebrating diversity, valuing justice and unity.</li> <li>8. Self-reflection and continuous enhancement of professional skills must be the hallmark of good teachers. The system of reward and promotion for teachers must acknowledge such efforts based on evidences such as collaborative and action research at the classroom and school level and students' progress and performance in academic and non-academic areas of concern.</li> </ol>
2: The Quality of School-Heads	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School principals must be inducted into the school system with an elevated consciousness of their role in promoting unity in diversity. They should be guided by the principles of the oneness of mankind and the inherent nobility of man in all aspects of school life. Unity in diversity must be embraced and internalized by school leadership sincerely and meaningfully.</li> <li>2. School principals promote a school culture that reflects more and more our national characteristics centred around the principles of the Rukun Negara rather than that of any particular race, culture or religion.</li> <li>3. School leadership should promote a school culture that rewards not only academic excellence but also rewards students who have shown personal</li> </ol>

	<p>integrity, perseverance, incremental progress in their academic performance, caring dispositions, ability to work in diverse groups and involvement in cooperative endeavours.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. School leadership plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers as well as the school climate and environment.</li> <li>5. School leadership should be concerned with school-wide achievement and learning by all rather than be focused on the academic excellence of a few.</li> <li>6. School leadership must provide instructional leadership and promote an active view of learning.</li> <li>7. Principals need to be engaged in effective schools research and should be concerned with continuous capacity building of their staff.</li> <li>8. School leadership should strive to engage parents and community as active partners in the education of children.</li> <li>9. The challenge for school leadership is to adopt and adapt well-proven practices from elsewhere, within the context specificity of their own school.</li> <li>10. Professionalise recruitment processes at both school and system level to ensure recruitment procedures, tools and criteria are effective, transparent and consistent in assessing candidates.</li> <li>11. Proactively identify and develop potential leaders and broaden eligibility criteria to attract younger dynamic candidates with different backgrounds. Provide options and support for career development to help avoid principal burnout; make school leadership a more attractive career option</li> <li>12. School leadership training and capacity-building should be reviewed not to focus merely on policies, skills and methodology, but should equally emphasise on the moral purpose of school leadership and its implications for practice.</li> <li>13. School leadership should be required to transform the school into a learning organization with a culture of systematic approach to consult on problems, take action and to reflect on action taken in order to sustain progress.</li> </ol>
3: The Quality of Schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maintain Optimum School size – avoid creation of premier or A grade schools with large student population. This only results in increasing the gap between these and other schools. Moreover large schools (some with almost 2500 students!) have inherent difficulties – such as maintaining discipline,</li> </ol>

	<p>impersonal staff-staff relationship, impersonal student-staff relationship, students hiding behind anonymity, hurdles to student-centred teaching &amp; learning, resources being stretched thin etc.</p> <p>Instead the Ministry should identify optimum school size and class size that will create a more conducive atmosphere for more effective management, maintaining discipline, implementing more student-centred pedagogy and for a stronger sense of belonging.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Promote establishment of neighbourhood schools with comparable facilities serving immediate neighbourhoods rather than creating schools with large disparity in terms of facilities and human resource. This will discourage parents looking for ‘good’ schools for their children, never mind the distances involved.</li> <li>3. If at all possible, do away with afternoon school sessions. This phenomena is the direct consequence of having a large school size. This practice has many drawbacks – foremost amongst them is the lack of ownership and togetherness among students and teachers. And certainly hot afternoons are not conducive for learning.</li> <li>4. Schools must pay attention to quality and cost of food served in school canteens. It has indeed a significant bearing on children’s health and learning. Nutrition is vital for brain power and health.</li> <li>5. Increase safety and security measures - A culture of safety must be promoted and nurtured in schools. This will have a long-term effect on students. Standard procedures for security and safety must be put in place in all schools and enforced in the interest of students and staff.</li> </ol>
4: Post School Opportunities	<p>It is recommended that our system allows for flexibility so that students do have the leeway to opt for a year of community service or to undertake independent self-enhancement activities ( travel, developing interests/hobbies, self-employment or part-time work, etc.) before moving on to tertiary education after completing school. This could contribute towards greater self-awareness, self-discovery and maturity in deciding not only the type of courses or discipline they would want to pursue at tertiary level but also in facing the challenges ahead as a young adult.</p>
5: Multilingual Proficiency	<p>An international auxiliary language should be adopted in addition to the mother tongue, however, the international auxiliary language should not suppress existing natural languages, and that the concept of <i>unity in diversity</i> must be applied to preserve cultural distinctions. Research has shown that proficiency in more than one language enhances intelligence and that the best time to learn languages quickly and effectively is during the early years of a child’s life. In the context of Malaysia, certainly multilingual proficiency will reinforce the primary role of the national language in contributing towards greater national cohesion Therefore:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More time should be allocated, particularly at the primary school level to</li> </ol>

	<p>the learning of both the English Language and the national language.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Time slots within the school curriculum should also be allotted for the learning of the students' mother tongue.</li> <li>3. At the secondary level students should be allowed the opportunity to choose a third or fourth language ( preferably a local vernacular).</li> <li>4. More than anything else, learning of language should focus on the functional use of the language and an appreciation of values intrinsic in the culture of the language studied.</li> </ol>
<p>6: School Curriculum &amp; Evaluation</p>	<p><b><u>School Curriculum</u></b></p> <p><b>1. Pre-school</b></p> <p>Emphasis should be given to character-building where the education process focuses on the acquisition of spiritual qualities. This critical, formative stage of a child should lay the foundation for good conduct through means and methods which are conducive to the child's psychological and mental health. Loving care, patience, positive disciplining and allowing space for curiosity, creativity and exploration will ensure a nurturing learning environment.</p> <p><b>2. Primary School</b></p> <p>As children progress to this phase of their formal education, moral reasoning and ethical concerns are important to foster the attitudes and skills necessary for fostering unity in diversity; for the very survival of humankind now depends on our ability to cooperate and on our collective commitment to justice and human rights for all. The ability to cooperate with others will also ensure that increasing numbers of people will benefit from the right to education. It is also during this stage that children build a strong foundation in moral character as envisaged in the National Education Philosophy which aims at producing a good Malaysian citizen possessing a "belief in and devotion to God", has high morals and responsibility towards self, society and nation. Hence, moral values should be integrated in the teaching and learning of every subject and not just confined to or compartmentalized within subjects such as religious or moral education.</p> <p><b>3. Secondary School</b></p> <p>With renewed emphasis on the objectives of the National Education Philosophy, teaching and learning at this stage of a child's formal education should be centred on channelling and navigating their energies and ideas towards the betterment of society.</p> <p>Rather than viewing them as passive recipients, it is necessary to ensure students are using higher-order thinking skills to analyse and make reasoned judgements, This can only be achieved when students' are learning new and bold discoveries</p>

in the knowledge of science and arts and finding ways to solve real-life problems within their immediate community and the larger society.

Taking into consideration the flowering capabilities of secondary students, it is vital that teachers' have the right attitudes to create a democratic learning environment conducive for mutual consultation and to deliberate on any subject matter without fear and be open to other opinions and arguments. This will help to cultivate critical thinking and the ability to give and accept constructive criticisms for improvement of the society at large.

Foundations in Comparative Religions, Moral Reasoning and Critical Thinking be taught in upper secondary and pre-university level for all students. This will help

- a) Students from various races and religions discuss and deliberate on ethical issues that concern every individual and community such as violence, drugs, consumption of alcohol, proliferation of corruption, abuse of the media, unfair trade, human trafficking, environmental degradation, etc.
- b) This can develop moral reasoning and create mutual understanding of each other's cultures and religions and the universal principles that bind them together.

#### **4. Education in service to community.**

Incorporate a well-planned service-learning component into the curriculum from the very beginning of secondary school so that students get to develop their latent virtues and talents through their contribution and service to their immediate community.

- a) Students should be rewarded for service projects that they initiate in their own neighbourhoods.
- b) Students can plan with the teachers and the community involved on the type of service project that is needed and carry it out during the year end school break.
- c) A suitable credit or merit system can be used to evaluate and reward students' initiative in performing various acts of service to bring about social transformation in their neighbourhoods.

#### **5. Evaluation**

- The system of assessment should be diversified to allow for different learning styles as well as to assess competencies that involve the affective domain and not just the cognitive and psychomotor domains.
- Current developments in alternative assessments ought to be employed effectively to obtain a comprehensive profile of a student's abilities rather than one skewed towards academic performance alone.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliable data obtained from valid assessments should be the basis of pedagogical and pastoral intervention to assist all students to achieve their potential.</li> <li>• While formal exams do have a place in the range of assessments, performance in exams should not become the sole measure of excellence and the sole criterion to label and judge the merit of schools and students.</li> </ul> <p><b>6. General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools allocate more time and give more emphasis to the use the fine arts such as drama, theatre and music as well as cooperative sports to nurture cross-cultural understanding, promote the spirit of oneness and develop personal self-esteem.</li> <li>• School policies promote and encourage clubs and societies which are multiracial and multi-religious and not ethnic and religious based clubs which do not foster diversity, cooperation and harmony.</li> <li>• Our schools while instilling a rational patriotism and love for the country, at the same time make our students become aware of their role as a global citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, appreciating the interdependence of the world and the understanding that the advantage of any of its parts can best be secured through the advantage of the whole.</li> <li>• We do not overload syllabus content and instead take on the ‘less is more’ approach and adopt a thematic and integrated approach to curriculum design.</li> <li>• We do not glorify and exaggerate the merits of ‘straight As’ in examinations at the expense of the self-esteem of others who have done reasonably well. Let not ‘sterling exam results’ be the sole measure of effective school leadership or teacher performance.</li> </ul>
<p>Priority 7 : The Role of Parents &amp; Community</p>	<p>1. Learning by experience should be amplified. Schools should foster an ethic of service to the entire human race, including one's family, neighbours, community, and nation; and provide the practical means for its expression in the education process through service-oriented programs. The community will feel ownership and investment in the school if it empowers the community to transform itself.</p>

	<p>2. Learning takes place beyond the classroom; therefore, anchoring education to community service can allow the parents and the community to play a supportive role as they will be the beneficiaries of the acts of service performed by the students. As a result, a meaningful partnership between the parents, the schools and the community will thrive.</p>
<p>8: The Utilization of Resources</p>	<p>1. Schools must be oriented towards helping each other to advance rather than trying to out-compete one another. Instead of emphasizing competition, education would do well, at this point in history, to foster the attitudes and skills necessary for cooperation.</p> <p>2. Establish cluster level multi-purpose resource centres. This could contribute in terms of cost benefit by taking advantage of economies of scale and to a certain extent promote collaboration among schools. These cluster level resource centres could serve several neighbourhood schools by providing facilities such as common swimming pools, gyms, sports facilities, stages and studios for promoting the fine arts, graphics and media production studios etc. In addition these multi-purpose centres should be staffed with expertise in sports, the fine arts, media and ICT who could support teachers and students in enhancing learning and in promoting a more balanced school life.</p>
<p>9: The Administrative Structure of the Education Ministry</p>	<p>The responsibility to generate new knowledge and apply it in socially beneficial ways rests on the shoulders of every young person. In the same way, the creation of an environment conducive to this process is a duty of every government.</p> <p>1. The administrative structure should decentralise the education system in a way that allows the School PTAs, the parents and the community to play a role in the decision -making process that involves the education of their children.</p> <p>2. There should be more emphasis on the important roles of PTAs in the administration of the schools so that parents take ownership of their children's learning process. A corollary is the community will feel ownership and investment in the school if it empowers the community to transform itself.</p>