

Mentor's Energizer

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Consensus Building

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As mentors, we know that everyone should use his or her capacities in positive ways to work for the common good, but to find examples of how this is happening in the real world beyond the textbook, is sometimes difficult. Beginning with the principle of the oneness of mankind, followed by the equality of men and women, lays the groundwork for trust. Understanding that progress only takes place when both the individual and the society make efforts to change, is a conclusion that our students and mentors have drawn from their service learning activities in the communities. Finally, rather than simply providing quick solutions based on economic prosperity alone, generation and application of knowledge enables people to become agents of change on their own behalf.

The means of social change need to be consistent with the ends. To express the universal human value of oneness in our social lives, we must adopt approaches that are unifying, rather than divisive. Consensus building, built on a foundation of universal human values, requires, not confrontation, but the changing of hearts. In order for these ideas to become a reality, rather than a mere enunciation of hope, the employment of frank, kindly and open dialogue is required. The method of gathering communities to discuss common issues and express their points of view openly, as facilitated by Happy Hippo Shows, advances the collective understanding of these issues. As people express their opinions freely and listen to one another, a realization occurs—that the common good does not always have to fully contradict the interests of the individual. In fact, preservation of the dignity of the individual is one of the aims of consensus building. Encouraging empathy and respect in people's speech and in the way they interact with one another, our students become models of the future they are building. When true consideration is shown for the views and feelings of others, constructive change can occur.



Citation in English translates as: **"I, Pranab Mukherjee President of India, present the Padma Shri to Dr. Mrs Janak Palta McGilligan to honour your individual Virtues. New Delhi Sd by the President of India ."**

"We need a new language that opens the door of understanding; not a language of power and domination, but a language that emerges from the depth of our self-discovery, of discovering ourselves as an inseparable part of a whole that is the cradle of the miracle of life. If we manage to provoke such a shift, we may still experience the satisfaction of having brought about a new century worth living in."
(Manfred Max-Neef, Chilean Economist known for his work in development alternatives.)

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Padma Shri Award

It is a great joy for the Bahá'í Academy to congratulate one of its Board members, Dr. Mrs. Janak Palta McGilligan who received Padma Shri Award on 30 March 2015 for her outstanding services in the Social Work category. She established and served as Director of the Barli Development Institute For Rural Women for about 25 years in Indore.

Dr. Janak Palta McGilligan wrote: March 30, 2015 was the most humbling day of my life when the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee presented the Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri awards at a Civil Investiture Ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan. This is the first time in my life when I was there in Durbar Hall in this ceremony in the presence of the Vice President of India, Prime Minister, Union Ministers of Home Affairs, Finance and Human Resource Development... After receiving the Padma Shri Award, straight away we went to the Baha'i House of worship (Lotus Temple) for prayers and thanksgiving... I thank all of you my friends and family for your continuous love and support and loving encouragement!



Dr. Mrs Janak Palta McGilligan receiving Padma Shri Award from Hon'ble President Of India, Shri. Pranab Mukherjee March 30, 2015



Another consensus building game:

Pass Around: Have everyone sit in a circle. Give each a paper and pencil/pen. Choose a topic like service learning. In total silence, ask each person to write an idea on his/her paper. Give 1 minute. Now, still in silence, pass the paper to the person on the right. The person reads and adds to the idea (1 minute). Pass again and again until the papers have been passed 5-6 times. The teacher reads the ideas aloud. Ask the students who participated, if their ideas were heard, if they recognized their original idea when it was read. This is a good way to get universal participation and then a spectrum can help the class decide what to do.

Consensus Building Games

See it, hear it, and do it—the components of true learning. Before heading out to a village to facilitate a dialogue about a weighty issue, students need practice on how to encourage people to express themselves and how to build consensus, which, in turn, will lead to action.

Spectrum—Voting doesn't work. A vote only tells if people agree or disagree. It doesn't tell if they will participate in any plan that has been decided. Choose a problem, take a few minutes to brainstorm ideas and then have the class stand in a line. One end of the line means that they are strongly interested and the other end means they are not interested at all. Participants can stand anywhere along the line. Once people are in place, ask the ones at the "not interested" end of the line why they are standing there. Modify the idea based on what they say and then ask people to move to show their interest in the modified idea. Continue modifying until there is strong consensus (one end of the line or the other). Strong consensus on the "interested" end, means action will take place. Strong on the "not interested" means the idea should be dropped.

Here's an example.

The people in a village were concerned about the air pollution caused by burning fields and garbage. Arguments broke out and it seemed the only solutions were "to burn" or "not to burn". Polarized, a Happy Hippo Show presentation showed two families in hot arguments about the best way to farm. Villagers, too, were polarized, until the issue was framed at a higher level—the level of unity—where all could agree that this was the actual problem. The new frame was: "How can we provide food for our village while maintaining a healthy environment?" Once this question was asked, all kinds of choices appeared: plow instead of burning, rotate crops in different ways, use organic pesticides to kill the remaining vegetation, bring in sheep to eat the stalks after harvest. After so many ideas came out, the villagers stood in a line. "How many are interested in using sheep to eat the leftover vegetation?" "How many want to plow instead of burn?" "How many want to burn some of the time?" As the questions occurred, the villagers moved and offered their opinions when they stood in different places in the line. Everyone was heard, and the final resolution was agreed upon by all, implemented immediately and the air quality in the village improved, as well as the unity of its people.



Back issues of the Mentor Energizer and the full Energizer Compilation are available on the website. If you've missed an issue, please feel free to download it at www.bahaiacademy.org

How do we create deeper conversations, which lead to greater growth?

We talk to people every day. Sometimes we just hear. Occasionally, we actually listen actively to what others are saying and we connect at deeper levels. A deep conversation is a meaningful one. It's not just chit-chat, but engages thought and feeling. Deep conversations generate empathy, compassion and caring about others and help us create positive, productive relationships. In a classroom, where students are used to simply repeat the material to show basic comprehension, going deeper is a challenge. Trust, which we talked about in the last issue, is needed for people to open up and share their true selves. In a classroom, it starts with the teacher.

Share Stories—Who are you? Your students want to know. Sharing your own thoughts, feelings and opinions in an open way lets students know that they, too, can share in an atmosphere of mutual respect. When we ask for someone's opinion, judgment should be the farthest thing from our minds. The objective is learning about who he/she is.

Meaningful topics: Everything starts with a foundation. Talking without a topic is like a building without a structural frame or music without rhythm. A good, strong topic which creates interest and generates thought is far better than one for which everyone knows the "correct opinion" to offer.

Quality, not quantity—You may find it's harder to generate a spark in some students than others; it's better to have shorter, quality conversations than lots of/longer "Hi, how are you? Fine thanks" ones. Start with lead ins such as, "I'd really like to hear your opinion on . . ." Or, "I was watching the news today and heard about . . . What's are your thoughts on the latest . . .?" Above all, nurturing relationships with kindness is a prerequisite for quality.

Ask better questions—Closed questions generate "yes/no" answers. Open questions require in-depth answers that lead to new topics developing. Consider proposing a set of questions in class, which involve universal human values. It's important to clarify points of view without judging by asking questions that help understand the facts and feelings involved in any issue. Think creatively about what you hear and how you respond. Growth occurs when any party in a conversation has an insight.

Next month: What is true communication?