

Has talisman been lost?

Headlines showing the youth problematique in South Africa



Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Man is the Supreme Talisman.
(Bahá'u'lláh 1976, *Gleanings*, CXXII, 258)

1.1 Has *talisman* been lost?

Bahá'u'lláh (1976:258), the founder of the Bahá'í faith, once described the state of human beings as that of a *supreme talisman*. The word *talisman* originates from the Greek *telesma*, meaning being endowed with magic powers and being capable of working wonders (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1991:1244). Being in the state of *talisman* implies having the ability to change the ordinary into the excellent, and to translate potentialities into real and praiseworthy qualities. It is this characteristic in human beings that motivates them to seek excellence, aspire to high standards, and strive for perfection. As Bahá'u'lláh (1976:67-68) himself explained, the state of *supreme talisman* is fulfilled when “...every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self has been endowed”. In this study, the state of *talisman* will refer to this quality of human beings, and thus the focus will be on developing the *talisman* in youth in order to help them develop their potential in both the affective and cognitive domains.

Achieving the state of *supreme talisman* is the wish of every leader, parent, and educator – especially for the youth who are the future leaders of society. The period of youth is characterised by strength and vigour and stands out as the choicest time in human life. Therefore, one hopes to see the youth spend their

adolescent years developing praiseworthy characteristics and acquiring high intellectual, moral and social standards – qualities that will prepare them for a productive adulthood and a purposeful life. This sort of life strains “...every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without” (Bahá’í, 1976:3).

Newspaper reports in South Africa, however, portray a picture of youth which is contrary to the wishes of every concerned parent, educator and loyal citizen. The reported behaviour and activities give the impression that some South African youth have forgotten about their *talisman* and in some cases have even lost it. The following reports are testimony to such a claim:

Grade 11 pupils in Cape Town spend about R22 million a year on cigarettes, alcohol, dagga and mandrax (Sunday Times, 17 October 1999).

Daniel has already attended five funerals this year. Each funeral was for a school child who died a violent death near school (The Teacher, June 2000).

Violence flares in N Province schools. ...pupils at ...high school allegedly held their principal hostage for five hours until police rescued him (Pretoria News, 2 June 2000).

Pupils questioned on school attacks (Citizen, 1 July 2000).

About 100 ... high school pupils went on the rampage in Vosloorus on Monday morning (Citizen, 16 August 2000).

Alarming increase in teenage suicides ...more and more youngsters are committing, or attempting suicide (Beeld, 15 April 1999).

Reading these newspaper headlines and extracts, it is possible to believe that there is a continuous decline in human values and a collapse of human standards among the youth.

Of course, one cannot rely on media reports alone; a deeper investigation is needed to verify these claims. Documents and statements from government officials and research studies paint a disturbing picture:

- South African prisons are more than 70 per cent overcrowded, with a total of about 176 000 offenders. While this figure represents prisoners inside prison, there are also 73 000 sentenced prisoners involved in community service. More than 4 000 of these are under the age of 18. Tens of thousands of prisoners are in the 18 to 25 age bracket. Crimes committed are of an increasingly violent nature, including murder, rape and assault (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2002:6).
- Many South African schools are struggling with problems of trespassing, vandalism, carrying and using weapons, drug dealing, rape, sexual abuse and other forms of physical assault and even murder (DoE, 1999:4).
- Even though school violence is not a new phenomenon, it is shifting in severity as fists are replaced with knives and firearms, and, in some areas, alcohol and mandrax are replaced by crack. (DoE & DoSS, 1999:8).
- A 1993 study of secondary schools in Cape Town (DoE & DoSS: 1999:11) revealed that knives were the most commonly carried weapons within schools and that firearms were the second most frequently carried weapons.
- Research conducted in 2001 by the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cape Town in 20 primary and secondary schools in the Cape metropole and surrounding area between February and June 1998 indicates that crime and violence are endemic to all schools. All schools indicated that theft of property and the possession of weapons were major problems. Fighting, physical violence and vandalism were reported in 95 per cent of schools. Drug abuse was a serious problem in 90 per cent of schools. Over 75 per cent of schools reported bullying and intimidation, 60 per cent reported assault, 50 per cent

reported gangsterism, and rape was reported in seven of the twelve secondary schools (Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town, in CSIR, 2002:8).

- According to the Gauteng Department of Education (in CSIR, 2002:11), the following crimes regularly affect school functioning – verbal abuse based on sexism and racism; opportunistic theft; common and sexual assault; assault with a weapon; robbery and burglary; intimidation; gang activity; drug abuse and peddling of drugs; possession of weapons; vandalism; arson.

The above statements not only confirm the truth of the media reports but also testify to the severity and diversity of the problems facing South African youth. It is apparent, then, that many South African youth are neglecting their *talisman* and are suffering from a variety of problems hereafter referred to as the *youth problematique*. This term is adapted from the *global problematique* – a term introduced by Aurelio Preccei (in Barney, 1999:25). In this study, youth problematique will refer to any kind of youth problem behaviour – including minor or major misconduct, juvenile delinquency, and anti-social behaviour – that hinders youth from realising their potential state of excellence or *talisman*.

1.2 Motivation for the study

1.2.1 Failure of schools to address the youth problematique

The responsibility for preparing youth to live a responsible life in society is mainly shared between the family and the school. Families often rely on the school to assist their children to realise their potential in acquiring the state of *talisman*. Examining reports from South African schools, it becomes clear that many schools are not equipped to fulfil this responsibility successfully, at least at present. In fact, some of them may actually contribute to the development of the youth problematique, and also fail to provide “tools of resilience”, in ways that are detailed below (DoE & DoSS, 1999:52):

- Contribution toward risk factors:
 - The authoritarian culture of school and classroom management does not provide models for creative problem solving, expression, and conflict resolution.
 - Schools fail to provide an alternative support unit in the context of high levels of family dysfunction.
 - Schools fail to provide meaningful life-defining and reflective activities such as sport, arts and culture, story telling, and discussion groups.
 - Schools fail to provide children, or their families, with the qualities and skills needed to raise non-violent children.
 - Schools fail to provide forums to process traumatic life experiences.
 - Schools implicitly support patriarchy and concepts of hegemonic “tough” masculinity.

- Failure to provide the “tools of resilience”:
 - Schools fail to provide children with a strong sense of confidence with regard to schooling.
 - Schools fail to provide communication skills, decision-making skills, or activities to formulate identity and self-esteem.
 - Schools fail to provide a sense of confidence in the face of adversity.
 - Schools fail to provide tools to discover one’s philosophical understanding of the world and one’s “place” in it.

Realising the inability of schools to handle the youth problematique, the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department of Safety and Security (DoSS) developed a *Joint Framework Document: Tirisano – Towards an Intervention Strategy to Address Youth Violence in Schools* – in an effort to reduce the problematique in schools. In spite of this effort, limited resources and the wide spread of the youth problematique throughout the country mean that many schools are still struggling. Considering the urgency of the youth problematique in South Africa, one would agree with Barber (1997:17) who said, “A well-balanced thoughtful society would surely give the highest imaginable

priority to ensuring that its young people were well prepared for this awesome destiny”.

1.2.2 The birth of the Youth Enrichment Programme

It was concern for the situation of youth in South Africa that brought together a group of interested individuals late in 1997. With Bahá'u'lláh's (1976:258) statement that “*Man is the Supreme Talisman; lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess*” as a point of departure, they looked into education for a solution to the youth problematique. The consensus was that, as Kabagarama (1993:2) says, “*Education has always been and continues to be an avenue for change*”.

As a member present at that gathering, moved and troubled by the remoteness of South African youth from their *talisman*, and as an educator involved in the training of teachers for over twelve years, I was inspired to take up the challenge. This humble and informal endeavour on my part culminated one and a half years later in the Youth Enrichment Programme (YEP).¹

YEP was designed to enrich South African youth morally, socially and cognitively, with the hope that those skills would help them to resist the forces of youth problematique in the society and enable them to improve themselves in pursuit of the *talisman*. YEP was based on the conviction that a deeper understanding of the value of human life and of its quality, resting on a spiritual foundation, must be developed. Human progress is often considered only in terms of man's physical well-being, and therefore his material needs have directed his activities towards the accomplishment of a higher standard of living. While it is true that such development is essential to the well-being and happiness of human beings, this study suggests that there are other dimensions of progress which must be included in education if youth are fully to realise their potential and achieve their *talisman*. Based on this view, YEP was created to develop the youth

¹ The material forming the original YEP programme, the training courses for the facilitators, and the pre-YEP courses are the copyright property of the Royal Falcon Education Initiative.

holistically, with special attention given to the development of moral and spiritual behaviour.

Since YEP was originally created to serve the community, it was decided to offer it to educational institutions and youth organisations as a community service project. Due to the shortage of teachers and adults who were available to offer the programme in schools, volunteer matriculant youth were trained as learning facilitators for YEP. Once the training was completed, the programme was piloted in schools in three provinces in July 1999.

Since then the programme has been shared and discussed with a variety of professionals and non-professionals including educationalists, principles, teachers, officers from the correctional services and youth organisations, and has been implemented in a handful of schools around the country. Moreover, a number of informal and semi-formal evaluation and research studies have been conducted on the programme. In spite of the shortcomings that were identified, the overall positive reaction of a diverse group of officials, educators, and learners motivated the task team to form a non-governmental organisation (NGO) to take forward the implementation and expansion of the programme.

As the author and designer of YEP, I was encouraged by the positive reaction of the pilot schools and their request to continue the programme, and was ready to take up the second challenge – to conduct my research study on YEP. Therefore, this study concentrates on the findings and experiences gained during the three years of the life of YEP.

1.3 Problem statement

The main aim of the study is to evaluate YEP in order to improve it. The major question addressed in this study is the following:

Is YEP an effective life skills intervention programme that can bring South African youth closer to their state of talisman?

To address this question, YEP is examined in respect of the following sub-questions:

- What is the relevance of YEP to the needs of South African youth?
- What philosophical and theoretical principles underpin YEP?
- What methodological approaches are adopted in YEP?
- How do the design structure and features of YEP relate to the theoretical and methodological principles?
- Does YEP influence the cognitive, social, and moral behaviour of South African secondary school learners?

1.4 Research design and methodology

The research design of this study is evaluative research. According to Clarke (1999:35):

Evaluative research is a form of applied research which aims to produce information about the implementation, operation and ultimate effectiveness of policies and programmes designed to bring about change.

In this study, the focus will be on an evaluation of YEP and its influence on the cognitive, social, and moral behaviour of secondary school learners. The evaluative research will help to identify the areas of strength and weakness of YEP and to determine where the programme needs to be revised. Both literature and empirical studies have been utilised.

The literature study explores the multiple theoretical principles and methodological approaches of YEP. Various sources – newspapers, magazines,

Internet articles, government statements and documents, TV interviews, speeches, periodicals and books – have been consulted.

In the empirical research phase, five case studies are included in the research – three secondary schools and one middle school in Limpopo (formerly Northern Province), and one College of Education in North West Province. Five institutions of learning, 450 learners from Grades 8 to 12, 46 teachers, and 4 facilitators participated in the study in 2000 and 2001. Qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were completed by the learners, the YEP facilitators, and the educators in the relevant schools. The data were analysed and triangulated within and across the cases.

1.5 Explanation of relevant concepts

Most of the concepts are dealt with where they occur in the text. However, the term “youth” and the Bahá’í faith need explanation at this point.

1.5.1 Youth

Youth means the state of being young. The *New Webster’s Dictionary* (1984:1155) describes “young” as:

Being in the first or early stage of life or growth; not old; having the appearance of early life; fresh or vigorous; pertaining to or characteristic of early life or youth; having little experience; ...being in the early part of existence.

The United Nations Youth Information Network (2000:2) defines youth as all persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This study adopts the definition given by the United Nations.

1.5.2 The Bahá'í faith

The Bahá'í faith is the newest and most recent of world religions. Its main purpose and teaching is the oneness of mankind and the establishment of unity and harmony among all people of the world. The Bahá'í faith believes in progressive revelation, which regards all the religions of the world as the continuous and successive guidance of God sent to man through different manifestations in different countries at different times in the history of humanity. Bahá'u'lláh is the founder of the Bahá'í faith, which has followers throughout the world.

Some of the theoretical principles of the YEP are inspired by Bahá'í teachings, including oneness of mankind, unity in diversity, individual investigation of truth, the abolition of all kinds of prejudices, and oneness of the spiritual message of religions.

A statement of these principles is made at the outset, with the view that the source of the principles that influenced the design of YEP had to be acknowledged in spite of the concern that the reader might doubt the impartiality of the study. This is done with the understanding that *“all research is contaminated to some extent by the values of the researcher. Only through those values do certain problems get identified and studied in particular ways”* (Max Weber in Silverman, 2000:200).

1.6 The Youth Enrichment Programme

1.6.1 Introduction to the programme

The Youth Enrichment Programme is presented in the form of a manual, which consists of the following sections:

- Relevance to Outcomes-Based Education;

- Method;
- Objectives;
- Table of Outcomes;
- Key Principles;
- What Makes this Programme Unique;
- Guide for Facilitators;
- Directions for Use;
- Ground Rules;
- Who can Benefit from this Programme;
- 39 themes or lessons;
- Glossary;
- References; and
- Evaluation forms for learners and educators.

The preamble to the introductory chapter in the manual (Farhangpour, 1999:2) describes the programme:

YEP is a contribution to equipping the youth with some rational, moral, social and spiritual skills necessary for living an independent, thoughtful, righteous and humane life, where he/she recognises that his/her well being is interrelated to those of others in society.

The programme focuses on the development of the following skills and values:

- *cognitive skills*: analysis, evaluation, comparison, synthesis, criticism, application, reflection, connecting and relating, constructing and reconstructing, problem solving, decision-making, and independent thinking;
- *social skills*: verbal communication, listening skills, interpersonal skills, gender sensitivity, culture sensitivity, teamwork/co-operation, and consultation;
- *moral/spiritual values*: peace making, tolerance, honesty, respect for oneself and others, respect for diversity, respect for moral and spiritual principles,

respect for law, respect for human rights, respect for humankind, fairness, kindness and love, caring, self-discipline, unity, and service.

1.6.2 The target group and the subject area

Young people aged 15 to 24 are the target group of YEP – those attending school as well as those who are outside the school system. In the latter group, youth belonging to institutions such as orphanages, youth clubs, correctional services and similar organisations are targeted. As far as formal education is concerned, the programme is intended to be used with youth in secondary schools during Guidance or Life Skills lessons. Therefore, it complements the academic curriculum; if used outside the school system, it will be an independent course.

1.6.3 The content and format of curriculum

The YEP curriculum consists of seven sections and 39 themes on various contemporary social, moral, and philosophical topics (see Appendix 1 for a sample theme). The following themes are included in the programme:

- Section One:
 - Importance of Education,
 - Content of Education,
 - Career,
 - Goals in Life,
 - Relationships,
 - Communication and Relationship,
 - Consultation.

- Section Two:
 - Peer Pressure,
 - Drug Abuse,
 - Alcohol Abuse,
 - Self-discipline,

- AIDS,
- Child Abuse,
- Health and Healing,
- Role of the Individual in the Health of the Community.

- Section Three:
 - Honesty,
 - Obedience to Law,
 - Democracy (1),
 - Democracy (2),
 - Financial Responsibility.

- Section Four:
 - Gender Equality,
 - Women and Peace,
 - Marriage,
 - Self-respect.

- Section Five:
 - Environment,
 - Relationship with the Environment,
 - Care for the Environment.

- Section Six:
 - Prejudice,
 - Resolving Conflicts,
 - Multi-culturalism,
 - Unity in Diversity,
 - Oneness of Humanity,
 - Peace.

- Section Seven:
 - Spiritual Empowerment,
 - Tests and Difficulties,
 - Joy and Happiness,
 - Service,
 - Immortality of the Soul.

The programme uses a modular format. Each theme consists of three sections:

- *Section A*: questions and posing of the problem: A series of interrelated questions are presented to the learners to answer individually after an stipulated period of reflection.
- *Section B*: expression of ideas and discussion: The questions in Section A are discussed in small groups of four to five persons.
- *Section C*: evaluation of quotations: Quotations and inspirational readings related to the topic of the theme are presented to the group for personal and/or group reflection.

Prior to the use of lessons, the learning facilitators are required to set ground rules with the learners. Rules such as respect, co-operation, open and honest expression of ideas, and everyone being entitled to his/her own opinion are stipulated as non-negotiable rules to be adhered to during all YEP classes. The lessons are conducted in heterogeneous groups of four to five learners, with a facilitator to guide the class.

The programme is designed to be conducted over a period of one to one and a half academic years, up to two hours per week.

1.7 Challenges and limitations

The process of conducting and completing this research study has been accompanied with challenges and limitations:

1.7.1 Challenges

- The task of analysing and identifying the theoretical principles, the methodologies and the structural design of the programme was strenuous and demanded a continuous process of self-analysis and meta-cognition. This was particularly difficult because often a mixture of lifetime experiences and beliefs underlies a design; this is used intuitively and may not be clear even to the designer at the time of its creation. As Clarke (1999:31) said, *“In reality, the theory behind a programme is not always made explicit nor is it fully articulated by policy-makers or programme designers”*.
- By virtue of the nature of curriculum, an evaluative curriculum study is a complex and time-consuming process, which requires thorough analysis and evaluation of various components of the curriculum. Therefore, a research study such as this one can hardly be complete or flawless.
- Maintaining objectivity at all times was difficult, as the designer of the programme and the researcher were the same. However, several steps were taken to make the study as objective and scientific as possible. These steps included the following:
 - Facilitators other than the author were trained and asked to implement the programme.
 - The programme was implemented widely and in a variety of schools in different provinces.
 - The facilitators were especially trained to conduct the empirical research.
 - The empirical research was conducted in different institutions of learning, including a middle school, a secondary school, and a college of education.

- Various research approaches were used – both qualitative and quantitative, as well as different questionnaires.
- A relatively large sample of learners was used in the empirical research, and three groups of respondents completed the evaluative questionnaire.
- The data collected from the respondents were compared and triangulated within the individual cases as well as across the cases.

1.7.2 Limitations

The following limitations to this study are noted:

- The statistics given on the state of the youth problematique in South Africa and the factors contributing to them are neither comprehensive nor always the most recent.
- The sample used in the empirical study is limited to one racial group. This was unintentional. It was not possible at the time to find multicultural schools where YEP could run continuously for the required 2½ month period.

1.8 The structure of the thesis

The development and implementation of YEP has been a story of the search for the *talisman*. Therefore, this report is a journey that will take the reader through the various stages of the search.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents a needs analysis of South African youth. The chapter examines the state of South African youth problematique, their educational needs, the developmental characteristics of adolescence, and the goals of outcomes-based education in relation to YEP. This chapter determines what factors have contributed to the problematique and what educational gaps have prevented youth from aspiring to the *talisman*.

Chapter Three identifies and discusses the philosophical foundations, the educational perspectives and the educational principles of YEP.

Chapter Four introduces the methodological approaches adopted in YEP. Authentic, transformational and holistic approaches are identified. Their relevance in terms of the principles of transformation and holistic teaching are explored.

Chapter Five examines the design of the YEP curriculum and analyses its structure, domains, implementation techniques and transformational design patterns as a means for translating the theoretical and methodological principles into practice. A sample lesson is analysed to display the practice-theory relationship.

Chapter Six discusses the research design, its methods and implementation procedures. In addition, five case studies are presented. The data within each case study are analysed and conclusions for each case study are made. Furthermore, the summary of the findings in the five case studies are compared and interpreted.

Chapter Seven provides a summary of the previous chapters, signifying the different stages in the search for the *talisman*. Final conclusions, unexpected findings, weaknesses, recommendations for improvement and suggestions for further research are presented in this chapter.