Finding Humanistic Education in Our Stories
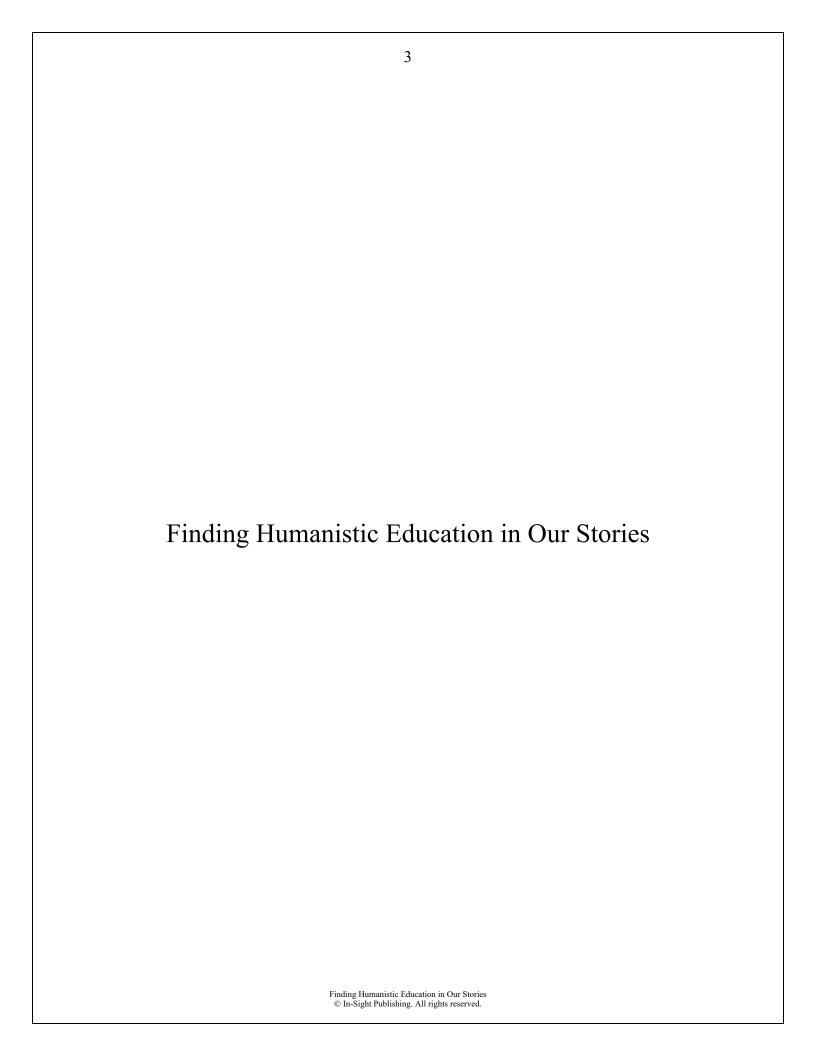
Scott Douglas Jacobsen
Dr. Nasser Yousefi
Baran Yousefi

Foreword by Dr. Nasser Yousefi

In-Sight Publishing

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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Acknowledgements

To the Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi, basically, for reaching out, and seeing where the hell we can take this. You never know for sure.

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Introduction by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

"It's easy to love somebody. Shit, sit with them a little bit and talk to them a while."

Richard Pryor

"The silver swan, who, living had no note, when death approached unlocked her silent throat."

Orlando Gibbons

The reimagination of education from the Yousefis comes from a sensibility of a "return to" rather than a "getting over" frame. A return to a humanistic referential mindset on the education of human beings with rich internal tapestries of thoughts and feelings connected to webs of extended social relations in the world rather than getting over them through the imposition of artifice. The nurturance of intellectual acumen and emotional sensitivities in tandem.

The Peace School served hundreds in Iran. The same institution, with a humanistic orientation, was formally registered in Spring 2024 in Canada. Individualized education based on each student's unique qualities demands extensive thought, time to plan, and care in implementing–a tall order.

Amid correspondence, Nasser described the times of working in Iran and difficult circumstances. A family who has come through conflict, societal constraints, and trauma to advance educational reform and to promote a humanistic vision through peace via innovative educational curricula. Their family's life story brings the antipodean pillars called Theory and Practice to a satisfying resolution in the Peace School—an Equator.

Transformative education only has to meet human needs as its base, and the diverse approaches to meet those needs can be as creative as necessary. The Yousefis champion each student's unique and individual cultural, emotional, and intellectual needs. Empathy and respect can counterforce the homogenization of education and approaches to each student. To argue for best practices in a humanistic educational curriculum does not mean an argument for standardized education; it means human beings in key development moments have basic and diversified needs, and principles can be the basis for formulating educational experiences for each pupil.

Their approach, fundamentally, is a values-based approach for the nurturance of critical thinkers who are knowledgeable and passionate citizens with a global perspective. This allows for a cross-cultural fluidity in seeing the universal endeavours and benefits of cross-cultural exchange and collaborative wisdom. Their unwavering dedication to humanistic approaches gives a bulwark against institutional inertia from political and societal barriers in Iran, and using this knowledge to advance humanistic education in Canada is a well-needed contribution to Canadian culture and global humanism.

This short book of conversations with the Yousefis gives insight into the communal bonds being built and the democratic participation being encouraged at the Peace School. Their approach isn't dogmatic but prompt-based to let one sit and think more deeply about a particular topic in education. You are not necessarily supposed to agree. The act of gentle coaxing into further consideration is the point. This approach plucks the strings of both mind and heart. Occasionally, some harmony results.

Foreword by Dr. Nasser Yousefi

I have been working in humanistic education in developing countries for over thirty years and have established diverse connections with international organizations. During these years, I have met and interacted with many experts and thinkers. Mr. Scott Douglas Jacobsen is one of the passionate and dedicated experts in humanistic fields who works tirelessly. Despite being young and energetic, he manages and follows through on numerous humanistic projects and ideas with remarkable maturity.

With his prepared resources, Mr. Scott Douglas Jacobsen has shaped the foundations and principles of humanism in the global community more than any other expert. Through his patience and wisdom, these resources have been developed. Without him, these concepts would not have been so easily documented. I am deeply grateful to him.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Baran Yousefi. As a graduate of humanistic schools, Baran has profoundly understood and embodied many of these concepts. I truly appreciate the collaboration between the three of us in advancing humanistic education.

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi on the Peace School

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi. They are originally from Iran but are now in Canada, specifically in Toronto. They have started a humanist educational system in Iran and are trying to implement the same system here in Canada. So, when did you first become interested in humanism, particularly in humanistic orientations around psychology and education?

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi: As a psychology university student, I–Nasser–was initially interested in Piaget's theories and methodology. However, when I started working with children, especially in rural communities, villages, and small towns, I found that this approach could have been more effective in those settings.

When I began working with refugee children living in camps or those experiencing difficult social and emotional circumstances, I realized the need for student-centred methods tailored to the individual needs of each student rather than a one-size-fits-all program. Working with a diverse group of children taught me that they have different needs and interests based on their life experiences and circumstances. This led me to adopt a student-centered and student-tailored approach to learning, drawing me into humanistic education.

I found that I had no other choice but to turn to humanism. Otherwise, I would have had to impose my ideas on the children rather than address their needs. My experience as a student in a controlling system made me determined to avoid repeating that scenario. Working with children at various times and circumstances taught me that students should have the choice to decide what they want and need to learn.

Humanistic education revealed to me that every child is unique and must discover their learning path, which is different from others. I realized that you can't apply a single approach to all children; you need to see them individually and create an educational program tailored to each student. Allowing them to experience a variety of experiences helps them flourish. This led me to study Maslow and Rogers, whose ideologies influenced my approach.

Their ideal is to consciously prepare educational programs based on student's needs, which requires constant adaptation from the teacher, not the students. I needed to harmonize with the students rather than expecting them to harmonize with me. The more I learned about humanistic education and psychology, the more intellectually and physically my students developed.

This realization led me to believe that providing opportunities for students to experience and explore without barriers is essential for their growth and expansion.

When you unblock students, they can learn and experience everything at their own pace. As they develop and learn more, you can develop alongside them. That's why our school and system were ahead of other alternative systems in Iran. We learned that we need to move forward with our students. Was that enough or bad?

Jacobsen: Yes, it was enough and not bad, thank you. What about pushback? I hear all the time, from international cases, of societies with a religious, fundamental dominance of governance, policy, and social life pushing back against any efforts to implement anything remotely humanistic, if not outright humanist. What did you experience from families, society, and even authorities?

Yousefi: When we started the school 20 years ago, it was new and still is for many people. Naturally, we faced issues, challenges, and pushbacks. One thing about families was that they wanted

the school to teach familiar subjects to their kids, things they also learned in school. They worried that by emphasizing the students themselves to learn and decide what to learn, both families and educational specialists thought students wouldn't know what they needed to learn. They believed it was our job and responsibility to tell them.

But I found that when you practice with students to experience and learn, they know what to choose and what they need. The biggest pushback we faced was the controlling mindset of adults who believed it was their right to decide what students should learn. This included families, society, and the government.

All of them wanted to decide for the children. At the beginning of the year, they would dictate what literature, science, and math meant. They were not open to teaching different narratives and perspectives. They insisted that history is what the government says, not any other narrative.

Our school encourages students to read from different perspectives and learn about various narratives. For instance, we tell them to read one book and then another that presents a different viewpoint. We want them to understand that differentcountries may have different versions of history.

Another challenge was the concern that allowing students to decide for themselves would make them stubborn and uncooperative. Many believed that giving control to students would make them selfish. But every time we listened to students and let them decide for themselves, they became more respectful toward us because we gave them that opportunity.

They would listen to me even more when I listened to their needs and words. No other school saw as much respect or empathy from their students as we did. The mainstream system feared adopting this approach because they thought they couldn't keep up and would need more resources or eventually give up. Public and other private schools preferred teachers to stick to a single, uniform curriculum nationwide.

However, we had a specific program for each student in the classroom. It was hard for the teacher, and the controlling system didn't want this to happen.

Jacobsen: When it comes to developing these programs for each student, is it as time-intensive as it sounds, or is there a factor of, in fact, saving time when you're allowing students to develop their way of learning and choosing material educationally? So, on the one hand, it is theoretically more difficult to deal with custom or individualized education programs per student. At the same time, you have something like a reverse classroom where you're removing barriers for students to learn at their own pace and pick subjects that interest them. While there's probably still a core of subjects they're all learning, is there a way in which, on the surface, it could seem more difficult to implement? Still, you're also saving time and effort by allowing students to develop their learning capacities.

Yousefi: Yes. The students would say what they wanted and were interested in learning. The teacher acted as a facilitator to help them learn, drawing a path for them. Yes, it was easier for the students to develop faster and learn what they wanted to learn. However, it was challenging for the teacher to help every student simultaneously because each child has unique needs. The diversity in our educational programs was due to the diversity of our student's needs, not because we needed more ideas. The students themselves brought the ideas and had the initiative.

But we did have some subjects and topics we wanted all students to learn. After introducing and discussing the topic, we encouraged them to explore it independently and from different perspec-

tives and resources. For example, we propose learning about a poet. One student might be interested in the poems themselves, another in the poet's biography, and another in different forms of poetry or the historical context of the poet's time.

Jacobsen: When you were trying to advocate for a humanist school system in Canada, what barriers did you experience? What differences did you notice compared to the situation in Iran?

Yousefi: The mainstream educational systems worldwide, including Canada, are heavily influenced by controlling and behaviourist approaches. In some places, it is different because they might have more resources or opportunities to deviate from the norm. Still, in general, they are based on behaviourism. Schools focus on preparing students to memorize information and prepare for current job markets.

There aren't enough systems that teach students they can positively change the world. The Ministry of Education in every country tends to maintain the current situation through schools rather than encouraging transformative thinking and humanistic education.

They don't want their students to know how to change the situation. It doesn't matter where—Switzerland, Canada, Iran, or anywhere else—every adult thinks they know better than children what is best and what is not best. "I have to determine what students should learn and study." This controlling idea could be more or less prevalent in different countries and circumstances. They even determine how students should look at things, dictating their perspective. It's like a 3D movie where the movie directs you to look at specific points, saying, "This is what we want you to focus on right now."

This approach only allows students to think independently. No school asks students, "What do you think? What makes you happy? What are you suffering from? How do you see the world?" There needs to be more engagement with students' perspectives and experiences. Only a few schools or teachers tell students they can change the world. Instead, they often say, "You need to fit into the system." This mindset discourages students from believing they can positively impact and improve the world for everyone.

Mainstream schools teach students to think about themselves and become individualistic, aiming for personal success, even if it's at the expense of others. This fosters a mindset where some people lie, create, or develop things that are harmful to humanity. They need to think about solutions that are equal and equitable.

The humanist educational approach advocates for a different ideology. It aims to help the world improve by empowering each person to show their talents and contribute positively. This is also true for Canada, where schools rarely ask students how they can help make the world a better place. This is one of the barriers we face constantly.

Teachers often need more time or energy to consider a child's needs and interests. Globally, the love that people should have for each other needs to be improved. If, as a teacher, I don't love my students, I can't teach them to love others. We have doctors and other professionals who don't show care and empathy towards those they serve.

We don't teach love in schools. They might teach sex education and other subjects, but they don't address the concept of love. Both are important. If we don't teach students about love, we take something vital away from them. In most systems, people are considered numbers rather than individuals with unique needs and potential.

It doesn't matter if it's one more or one less. To them, it's just a number. This humanistic approach is trying to promote human love. Every human being, wherever they are, is important. It's about recognizing the combination of a person's identity, emotional, and social aspects. This holistic view helps make the world a better place to live. If I can't empathize with your sadness or suffering, I can't truly help you. Compassion is at the heart of humanist education principles.

The humanist educational approach revolves around compassion, empathy, and love. While acknowledging the importance of the individual, it also emphasizes the importance of others. The education system in Canada and other countries often needs this focus.

Jacobsen: Last question. From what I'm gathering, does this humanist educational program, individualized per student and grounded in humanistic psychology, authentically focus on the student's intellectual and emotional development?

Yousefi: Yes, exactly. The program helps students develop intellectually and emotionally by allowing them to learn what they need while being mindful of and caring for others. It adapts to the situation at hand but remains focused on authentic development.

Jacobsen: Great. Thank you.

Yousefi: Thank you.

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi on Humanist Curricula

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you get funding for these educational efforts in the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi: So, everything is provided by the tuition. We didn't have any extra funding or financial support. The school was supervised by an NGO in Iran. It was a project of this NGO. The NGO provided all the educational programming and everything else. Nothing came from outside the school; it was all within the NGO and the school system.

Sometimes, we held events to provide fun activities, like concerts or art exhibitions, and all the funds gathered from these events were used exclusively for the school. Most of the support and help we received came from volunteers. Many of our operations, educational programs, research, and even teacher training were handled by volunteers. We needed to pay only for basic things, like the rent for the building and our full-time teachers.

Everything we paid for was solely for the students. Aside from the building and salaries, everything else was handled by volunteers. Research, planning, and everything else were done voluntarily. The parents whose children were enrolled in the school also helped. We wanted the parents to be part of the whole system and to participate. When they helped and supported the school, it became important to them. Sometimes, we would ask if they had a party room in their building for events or meetings, if they could help with transportation or field trips, or volunteered for library operations. Anything that could reduce our expenses. The whole project was so interesting to them that they wanted to be involved.

They were so excited about the whole project and the school concept that they didn't wait for us to ask for help; they did it themselves. One of the school's principles was that we believed the whole community was our school. We could use community resources as learning opportunities for our students rather than building or creating new opportunities. We always used available resources provided by families, whether they worked in a company, factory, vet clinic, or lab.

Those opportunities were the best for our students to learn something new. It also decreased our expenses and created more learning opportunities. It helped us create a culture of utilizing available community resources for children. Instead of building something ourselves, we used what we already had. This model could be used in any city, not just the capital or larger cities. It could work in any city based on available resources and people. Looking at it broadly, there are many opportunities for schools to use for their students. It doesn't mean we must create them; they are already available.

This approach also allowed us to have multiple field trips and use community resources. All the libraries in the city were our schools. All the museums were our school. Every company, factory, and store became part of our learning environment. We viewed the entire city as a learning opportunity. It meant that everyone in society was a teacher for us. The museum guide, or guides, yes. They would have been the best teachers, especially for the Museum of History. Or people who worked at the laboratory.

They were the best teachers for biology. We were open to other people becoming our teachers. We were fearless of letting more people join our team and welcomed them as much as possible. Everyone in Tehran, where we were based, was very welcoming to our students and the school. We wanted to hear from them because we respected their talents, abilities, and everything. We wanted

them to be the experts in some situations, and they did everything they could for us. That's why we never encountered any closed doors from the people.

We did face situations where the government closed doors for us, but people were very open and welcoming.

Jacobsen: A few things come to mind. This will be the shortest of the three I have in mind. When people own a school or the educational system and participate that way, did they adopt a motto or slogan within the school?

Yousefi: Yes, the founders had a motto. The school slogan was "Make the world a better place." The teachers never expected anything specific from the students. Still, they always asked them to improve the world for themselves and others, regardless of their jobs or careers.

Yes, it doesn't matter what job or career you follow; you can improve the world. You are not allowed to hurt anyone or make someone else suffer. You need to love others and show empathy and compassion. We tried to teach love and empathy. As teachers and adults, we don't have much to teach students, but we can spread love to them.

Regarding the concerts and other fundraising efforts, we raised funds to reduce operating costs and lower parents' fees. These concerts were private and not publicly announced. Generally, anyone is allowed to hold a concert, but for largerpublic events, they need a permit from the government. For us, it was different. Women, for example, are not allowed to perform publicly. Our fundraising concerts were all private and spread by word of mouth.

This touches on the third question, which might require a longer response. We did face some pressure and pushback from the government. The main issue was that they didn't recognize us as a school. This meant we couldn't give any diplomas or certificates to our students. So that was one of the issues, yes. The government wants every school to follow its curriculum and textbooks, and the same textbooks are used across the country. It doesn't matter where the school is; every student has to read the same textbook.

That was one of the main issues and pushbacks. One of our biggest challenges was that the government only believed in one system and approach. They didn't even allow an alternative approach to be considered. However, we wanted to continue promoting different and multiple approaches and methods worldwide, and we believed we had to at least look at them. We wanted to promote and support diversity rather than singularity, but the government needed help.

They wanted their system and approach to be seen and recognized. It doesn't matter where you live in Iran, whether in the north, south, east, or west; everyone has to read the same textbook. It doesn't consider their cultural, religious, or political backgrounds. Everyone has to read the same textbook and take the same exams. However, we must consider the child's cultural background, history, language, stories, and even religion in their educational program. Iran has a diversity of religions and languages, and we can't ignore this diversity. You can speak up to one language when there are various languages. In the humanistic approach, we must consider this diversity and these differences. We wanted to do this, and we tried to do it. Of course, we still try to do it, but the government doesn't support it.

Jacobsen: So, no political violence was enacted against any of you, the students, the teachers, or the families. Is that correct?

Yousefi: Violence in the sense that we might usually imagine? No, because we were conducting a research project. The development of this alternative method over twenty years was a massive research project. We always told government organizations we were implementing a research project to expand educational diversity. We always spoke as a group of specialists. However, I believe that the fact that we were never officially recognized and our students were unable to receive an official diploma is itself a form of violence.

Jacobsen: When you're in a highly religiously controlled society, and everyone, regardless of background, has to take these examinations and follow the educational curriculum, what is in it? What do people have to learn? Is it anything connected to the real world? Which parts are useful, and which are nonsense that train people to be effective citizens in a theocracy?

Yousefi: The focus of the schools is, after all, the promotion and expansion of religious thought, specifically introducing students to Islamic teachings. However, Iran is rich in diverse religions, where followers of different faiths have lived together in peace for centuries. When the official education system ignores this diversity and doesn't provide opportunities for dialogue among followers of various religions, ethnicities, or minorities, diversity and plurality are ultimately lost. Of course, followers of religions like Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and others had schools that only enrolled students of their faith. However, there was no interaction between students of different religions within the official education system.

Jacobsen: As part of the curriculum, are kids taught things that aren't useful, like prayer and other religious practices, that might be meaningful to the parents but not necessarily effective for dealing with the realities of life when they grow up?

Yousefi: In mainstream schools, there are subjects for religion and prayer. We don't know how parents feel because we aren't in contact with parents from mainstream schools. Still, we hear they aren't very satisfied with what's happening. We also hear that sometimes their children practice something at school but something else at home, leading to conflicts.

They only study and read to pass exams. They don't necessarily believe what they study. This isn't limited to religious subjects; it includes history, literature, geography, and even science and social sciences. Students memorize the textbooks to pass exams. The textbooks include stories in literature that students have to read, but these are only sometimes the books they choose when they go to the library. We wanted to connect school and personal life, not separate them. It wasn't easy; being honest with yourself and your education while maintaining balance was hard.

Jacobsen: Does the mainstream educational system make any distinctions between Sunni, Shia, Ahmadi, or Quranist interpretations of Islam, or is it all one version?

Yousefi: No, it only talks about Islam in a general sense. Discussions around Zoroastrianism and other faiths are not included. The government has its version of Islam that it promotes. It could be more realistic and accurate; it's just something the government developed.

Jacobsen: A friend of mine is a cosmologist at UBCO and Lethbridge. He's a Quranist Muslim. We've been discussing interfaith topics for a long time. He's big on interfaith dialogues and humanistic interpretations of Islam, which might appeal to secularized individuals. However, this isn't that. I'm a minor figure doing administrative stuff for them. Still, the Canadian Quantum Research Center has a decent number of citations.

Jacobsen: Let's contrast what was described with the mainstream system's method and how it doesn't recognize anything other than a single worldview, and not in an educational sense when

I'm thinking about it. They're taking it as true rather than a secularized world religions class, where they teach what people believe and let you decide for yourself. It's much different. They've pre-decided for you. What's your humanistic approach to this?

Yousefi: We consider religion to be part of a child's background. Many Persian poems have roots in Islam, Zoroastrianism, or even Judaism. So, when you want to learn about Rumi or Hafez, you must also learn about those roots. For example, you can't understand Hafez's poems if you don't know the Torah stories or Rumi's poems without knowledge of the Quran. The same applies to Eastern countries. If you don't know the Bible, you can't fully understand Victor Hugo's or Charles Dickens's stories.

Talking about the Bible, Quran, or Torah is necessary to understand literature and poetry. It doesn't mean we are promoting that religion. Rather, it's about understanding the culture and history needed to grasp something else. The same goes for science. Some scientific concepts have come from Eastern or Western positions or even how we look at evolution. There are different narratives about evolution rooted in religion. Discussing a scientist or physician doesn't mean we are endorsing their religious views. We are discussing their ideas and theories. We only focus on religion as a background context. We don't have a specific subject for religion, but we touch on it to explain the backstory of other topics. If a student is curious about a religion, we open up, considering it a great learning opportunity. But we always respect all religions and those who follow them. We are one of the rare schools with diverse religions, but we never promote any particular one.

We always help students learn more about a religion if they have questions. Some families specifically asked us not to talk about any religion, especially in Iran. However, we could only say yes if a child was interested in learning about Islam or any other religion. We respected their curiosity and taught them about it without promoting it.

In the context of Iran, if you advocate for something other than Islam, there could be negative consequences. But we never wanted to advocate for a specific religion because it would mean we couldn't respect others. We wanted to allow students from other religions to speak freely and be heard. One year, the students themselves asked for a class on religion. We had a program to introduce each religion without advocating for any. We also explained that some people are atheists and don't believe in any religion. We focused on diversity, saying, "This is it," rather than limiting ourselves to one viewpoint.

This approach wasn't limited to religion. It extended to literature and music as well. Some schools only teach one genre of music or one instrument. We introduced different genres and instruments, even challenging ones. We aimed to discuss the best examples in each genre across subjects like arts and science.

If a school restricts everything to one religion or genre, it restricts diversity. We encouraged students to love their country and respect other countries, lands, and nationalities. We never advocated for nationalism or exclusivity.

Jacobsen: So, that's good. This last response will be helpful for those in Canada who may have a stereotype of what Iran is like. There's this ghostly governmental presence that restricts everyone in every way. Can you describe the humanistic model of education, whether about politics, religion or anything else, in a compact way as something like individualistic cosmopolitanism for learning about a wide range of human identities and truths about the world in a semi-autonomous direction?

Yousefi: I am not a representative of the Iranian government, and the government never approved my educational and research work. Therefore, I cannot say what the public schools were thinking or what they expected from this education. Whatever it was, I was critical and opposed to the educational system.

Since the humanistic approach's main objective is respect, it considers every person's aspect and background. It allows people to talk about who they are today, helping them take the next steps. A humanistic teacher is not an ethics teacher; it's not someone who judges people. It's a person who accepts a child in every aspect, in every way possible.

For example, we consider children and see where they stand and what they bring from home, their past, their background, their culture, and everything else. But we don't judge that child and their background. They will never trust us again if we judge them or share their dreams or thoughts. So, we need to accept them as they are, wherever they are, so we can help them take the next steps toward the future.

A humanistic teacher needs to correct the child immediately. We wait long enough to address their mistakes, issues, or misunderstandings. Sometimes, students come with a racist point of view, and we don't stop them immediately. We listen and ask them to talk enough so we can understand where they need help. If we start to correct or judge them immediately, they will stop being honest with us and never share their thoughts. So, language, politics, religion, or nationality are not priorities for a humanistic education. What's important is their characteristics, personalities, emotions, and understanding of the world; we must fully understand them to help them grow and develop. A humanistic teacher is more of a caregiver than a traditional teacher.

It's someone who takes care of the children. We care about policies that support caring for students and children, whether regulations, concepts, or theories. The world needs caregivers more than traditional teachers—not caregivers in the sense of caring for someone ill but someone who genuinely cares for children's development and well-being. But that's where I differ from a behaviourist teacher to a humanistic teacher.

Jacobsen: Is there a risk in teaching students intellectual and analytical skills without a proportional development of emotional and social skills in students? A healthy development of the sentiments to make the intellectual and analytical skills more rounded.

Yousefi: It's both the holistic approach and integrated education. Integrated education means we pay attention to the child's needs immediately. You can't say that you only focus on their cognitive development without paying attention to their nutrition or malnutrition. You can only focus on social skills by considering society's rules and regulations. Cognitive psychology and behavioural psychology both caused the issue of segregating these needs. Cognitive psychology focuses only on cognitive needs and doesn't consider emotional and social needs.

Behavioural psychology only focuses on individual success and forgets that a child is a complex person with different developmental skills and needs. Paying attention to only one aspect and disregarding the others can be dangerous. It could be creativity, reasoning, or analyzing. We need to work on every need and aspect of a child at the right moment. Suppose we skip paying attention to emotional and social needs. In that case, we might end up with scientists who make bombs, promoting war and destruction.

Who's making these bombs and weapons of mass destruction? It's often those specialized individuals who lack emotional and social skills. They never had the opportunity to develop empathy and

compassion. Yes, there are doctors and physicians involved in organ trafficking or mutilation who lack empathy. Where did they go to school? They might have attended very controlling and closed schools that forced them to think about war due to their conditions.

The world's educational system fails to teach people to love each other and empathize; defending any war means going against humanity. Most of the workforce involved in the war, whether in the army, weapons factories, or transportation, attended schools that failed them. Teachers must answer how we taught them and who they became. It's very sad and makes me emotional.

Jacobsen: Let's shift topics so you don't cry. Famously, Professor Noam Chomsky essentially destroyed B.F. Skinner's behaviourism in an 8-page review article. This brought about the cognitive revolution, and humanistic psychology evolved from it. Rogers and other fundamental humanistic psychologists are dead. How has humanistic psychology and humanistic education evolved since its inception, so the cutting edge in the 2010s/2020s?

Yousefi: This person, Noam Chomsky, wasn't the first to write against behaviourist education. He was one of the prominent critics. Maslow, Ferrier, Rogers, and Fromm were all critics of the behaviourist approach. People like Yalom and Pinker also criticize it. I am also a serious critic of behaviourism in my country. We cannot easily overlook a system that harms students' psychology so much. We must raise our voices against behaviourist education.

Some people start questioning it when you shout negatively. I am happy to have been among the few to question behaviourist education. It's good when behaviourist psychologists and educational specialists hear this criticism. Yes, it's like validation that you're doing the right thing—not that you intended to, but you were compelled to.

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi on Humanistic Education's Necessity

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Round 3 with Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi. Hello. How are you today?

Dr. Nasser Nasser and Baran Yousefi: Good. How are you?

Jacobsen: Thank you. I'm good. I had a nap, coffee, and Diet Pepsi, and I'm doing well. I was listening to Nelly. He's a decent rapper in some of his songs, so I'm doing well. Let's talk more about humanistic education. What is the importance of humanistic education today? When I say this, I'm being trite because humanistic education should be valuable in any era. So, in the contemporary period, what is the appeal of humanistic teaching? And in the Canadian context, where educational outcomes are generally good, what areas could humanistic education improve even further? Those are the more relevant questions I have.

Yousefi: Thank you for giving us this time to talk about this. Humanistic psychology started shortly after World War II, so it's been almost 70 years. It has opened many doors around the world and introduced various new subjects.

It has made significant contributions to healthcare, sociology, and industrial psychology. However, it still needs to enter education or promote itself within the educational system. It has influenced other fields, but education and schools are still needed. The humanistic approach, in general, has found its way into evolutionary biology, digital science, technology, and evolutionary anthropology.

Developmental psychology, economics, and other disciplines have also been impacted. But it hasn't fully entered schools. Behaviorist education, established before and after the First and Second World Wars, continues to dominate schools.

The behaviourist model has long been entrenched in the educational system, and the schools that promote this approach are very powerful. This causes a contradiction between the expansion of the humanistic approach in other fields and its stagnation in schools.

It's interesting and surprising how humanistic psychology is developing and expanding rapidly in various sectors, yet schools remain resistant. Many philosophers argue that humanistic psychology is changing the world and making it a better place. Still, schools have closed their doors to it. Behaviorist schools claim, "We're fine; we're working."

We're doing very well. We don't need that. It's not a matter of time. We can work that out. Even in Canada, they're saying that our schools are good. Why do we need that in other schools? Schools are doing very well—not just in Canadian schools but in all schools worldwide that are influenced by the behaviourist approach to education. In these schools, everything—the curriculum, the lesson plans—is predetermined for students.

Specialists decide what students should learn, what they should study, and even what they should not learn. Sometimes, they even predetermine the resources students should access or not. It's essentially saying, "What I define as learning is what you should consider learning." You will only succeed if you learn what I'm telling you. You have to study the material thoroughly and memorize it to pass.

This approach applies to all levels of education—from preschool and kindergarten to university. Some individuals decide in advance what students should learn. However, they never ask students what they think, what they want to learn, or how they perceive different topics. What I, the teacher, tell you is more important than what you think.

In this system, the teacher enters the classroom with a predetermined lesson or program and simultaneously delivers the same content to 20 or 30 students. Behaviourist education claims to contribute to public knowledge by teaching everyone the same subject or content. However, it is more about imposing information on students, whether they want to learn it.

While teachers deliver the same material to all students, they expect each student to practice and internalize it individually. Students are required to learn it on their own and then take tests or quizzes by themselves. The emphasis on individual grades and assessments forces students to work in isolation.

They are taught to keep their knowledge to themselves. Even though we teach one thing to everyone, they must practice and master it on their own. The grading system, specific to each student, encourages them to address issues or subjects individually, leading to competition. Students aim to achieve the highest grade alone, without collaboration.

This system fosters individuality, not individualism. It tells students that only they can learn the subject and help themselves succeed or pass the grade. Those students who achieve the highest grades often receive more benefits, whether through compliments like "You're smarter" or other rewards.

You're more intellectual. But we don't interpret this as "This student did what I wanted them to do." Behaviourist education says that if a student does what the teacher wants, the student is smarter.

We also see students who, for various reasons, may not want to engage with a particular subject or may not spend as much time on it as others. Behaviourist teachers or schools often label those students as not smart or underperforming.

When students are taught to study alone, focusing solely on themselves and their success, they lose sight of the collective good or the needs of others. They are conditioned to believe that their success is only about them.

Humanistic education is the opposite of behaviourist education. Since every student is unique, we introduce various topics and programs tailored to each individual. We ask students what they think and want to learn—not based on what we want as educators but on their interests and needs.

We ask the students and gather input from teachers, parents, and others involved in the student's life. We then design a program specifically tailored to that student. Something interesting happens in this process: although the learning experience is individualized, we encourage students to share what they have learned with others.

We ask them to share their thoughts, explain where they are in their learning journey, and discuss what they have gained from it. If they need help, they can ask for it. We promote a culture of sharing among students. Hence, they learn not just from their own experiences but also from the experiences of their peers.

In this way, education becomes a collective process; what one student learns individually benefits everyone. We move forward together, helping each other develop our knowledge because we recognize that no one can achieve everything independently.

This is the main difference between humanistic and behaviourist education. Behaviourist education begins with a general topic for everyone, often leading to individualism and isolation. In contrast, humanistic education uses individual needs and interests to contribute to the community and support others.

While humanistic education focuses on individual needs, interests, and characteristics, it teaches students how personal growth can help others. In contrast, behaviourist education doesn't allow students to discover their interests or needs because no one asks them what they think or want. They are told what is important and what they should study, which leads to standardization.

Eventually, in behaviourist schools, all students become the same. They end up listening to the same music and following the same path because individuality is lost. It's a form of educational standardization which limits personal expression and development. They wear the same clothes and eat the same food. When you go to different countries, you notice that young people seem similar. They all look the same, listen to the same music, and watch the same movies. It's all part of standardization.

It's a result of behaviourist schools, which emphasize standardization over personalization. These schools focus on making everyone conform but only care about superficial conformity. In humanistic schools, however, we emphasize personalization. While we encourage students to align with others and think about others, we also emphasize the importance of moving forward together.

In behaviourist schools, students are constantly told to think about themselves and be individualistic. Over time, students can become narcissistic because they receive the message that they need to be successful above all else. They are taught that if they are successful, they are good people.

As students compete and compare themselves to one another, they develop narcissistic tendencies. They believe that the grades they receive reflect their worth as individuals and that achieving high grades makes them inherently good people. The schools, however, forget to teach compassion.

Erich Fromm discusses this in his work. He points out that behaviourist schools don't nurture love in students; instead, they nurture narcissism. Selfish people don't truly love themselves—they have a distorted view of themselves, which was shaped during their school years. They don't have real self-love.

A person who doesn't truly love themselves cannot love others. How can someone who doesn't love themselves help or care for others? They may appear successful in university or society. They may even become doctors, but a doctor who doesn't love their patients won't communicate effectively or care for them with empathy. They might become a successful engineer, but they won't care about the person who uses their product. Their focus is solely on selling their product, not its impact on people.

These individuals are constantly thinking about their interests. Around the world, people suffer at the hands of physicians who don't care about their patients or others who provide services without compassion. For services to truly benefit people, the provider must care about those using the service.

That's why we see products and services being developed that don't truly benefit people. In some European countries, those involved in human trafficking are often also involved in organ trafficking. And who performs these organ operations? Prominent doctors—highly skilled professionals.

It raises questions. Which universities did they attend? The people involved in making chemical weapons or atomic bombs are among the best chemists and scientists in the world. Yet, they use their skills in ways that harm humanity. These are the best in their fields, but their focus is purely on their professional success, not how their work affects others.

Where did you go to school? How could you create something that works against humanity and humans? This results from an education system that needs to place more emphasis on individualism and individuality. Schools aren't doing well—not just in Canada, but everywhere. This is exactly where humanistic education can help future generations. We need to help humanistic education enter schools. The humanistic approach has a direct connection to peace. The more the humanistic approach develops, the closer we get to peace.

Steven Pinker also agrees with this theory. He supports that peace grew and developed when the humanistic approach expanded to other subjects and areas. We should evolve education in schools to help students think about and help others. In that case, we can see significant changes in the world. But do we need to overhaul the entire system?

The world, as it stands now, needs this humanistic approach and this testing. A country like Canada could be the first to adopt this and advocate for other nations to follow. We can transform the educational system by fostering a loving and compassionate approach to education. If Canada takes the lead, many other countries will follow. My current lifestyle only works for some. We need to help people feel better and live better lives. The humanistic approach always supports this theory. It focuses on both individuals and others at the same time. As teachers, we can carry this philosophy to the next generations and help them thrive.

Jacobsen: Just a quick follow-up to the previous question. There are three systems at play in practice. One is more secular, meaning no religion is involved. If we take big countries like China, they use a particular political ideology as the metric for success. Students are expected to follow the party line in certain subjects, and the entire education system is geared toward conformity with the state. The focus is on creating engineers and scientists who serve the state. At the same time, they must align with party ideology in the political realm. It's a form of looking out for oneself, but it's out of fear and in service of the state. Another system is non-secular—it's religious and theocratic.

You might even find someone like Harun Yahya, also known as Adnan Oktar, who wrote *The Atlas of Creation* in the educational curriculum. You're learning about intelligent design and creationism from an Islamic theological perspective. In that case, you're in a similar system, but it's bound to religious ideology. You see this in small Christian cults in different parts of the world. So, it's not limited to a particular religion—it's just a faith-based version of an education system.

Another version, which you described precisely, is where individualism isn't developed, but individuality is. That individuality is based on competition between people and fits well into any rank-ordering system. If you get an A, you're a good person; if you get a D, you're a bad person. Your self-esteem, self-worth, and self-concept become tied to your grades, extracurriculars, and your school's prestige—whether it's an Ivy League institution or not.

In this last example, you see the development of narcissism. I need to conduct formal research on connecting these ideas. Still, I've spoken to experts and read works that suggest there has been a

rise in narcissism in North America and probably in Western countries in general over the past few decades. As for the first two examples—the secular, dogmatic education system and the religious ones—I'm not sure if there's been a similar rise in narcissism. However, there's a common thread in all three, which is deindividuation, something you noted earlier.

Everyone becomes more or less the same. There might be reasons for this: it could be framed as social cohesion or harmony, ensuring everyone believes in the correct faith and the right God, or ensuring everyone becomes self-sufficient in society. These outcomes may be helpful to the individual. Still, they seem more beneficial to the country's dominant ideology.

So, within a humanistic model, what is the main proposition differentiating it from these three systems, which lean more toward a behaviourist approach? What are the core differences, aside from that the person in the humanistic model isn't developing their individuality for more intangible things like healthy emotional development? As you would know better than I, people who slide into higher levels of narcissism are often emotionally, developmentally, and maturationally stunted.

You could summarize all that by saying that, in each case, people follow a faith-based system with the "correct" religion and political dogma or worship the Self.

Yousefi: Those directly involved in policymaking, particularly in education, don't necessarily love human beings. What they share, regardless of the system—whether secular, communist, religious, or capitalist—is that they don't truly care about humans. It doesn't matter which ideology they follow. It doesn't matter what policy a government follows if it doesn't care about humans. Any system that lacks compassion for people is inherently corrupt.

Love for humanity is not just a simple feeling or a curiosity-driven sentiment; it is a deep respect for the historical journey of human life. Modern humans are the result of billions of years of evolution. Astonishing events have occurred for us to reach this point. Billions of humans and living creatures have evolved to achieve this position. Today's human is the product of all their ancestors' pain, suffering, and hardships. They result from our ancestors' incredible struggles to survive and overcome diseases. We are even the outcome of all the efforts our ancestors put into learning skills and enhancing their abilities.

The genes that today's humans carry have a long history of health, wisdom, and awareness. This is how we can trulyspeak about love for humanity. When a human is killed in war or violence, a treasure of wisdom and knowledge is left incomplete. In this way, it's impossible to look at humanity without feeling immense respect, gratitude, and love for nature, evolution, and life itself. How can one look at a human and not view their background with admiration and love? How can one work for humanity and not let this love flow into action?

If we love human beings, everything changes. Everything changes. We need to focus more on this concept of love than on the specifics of education or capitalism. The policymakers and people in charge are confusing us with these titles—secular, non-secular, communist, capitalist, and so on.

They are causing suffering by using these titles as labels, which goes against all our evolutionary and societal progress. I am committed to promoting love for human beings and teaching students and children how to love others. If we learn to love others, we can improve healthcare and the economy. We can make everything better. And now is the time to do that.

Jacobsen: I should clarify. Is it hatred of people? Or is it an incomplete understanding of the people leading to this suffering in all these different cases? That's an important distinction.

Yousefi: Yes. So, he generally believes that love can solve any problem we face. When I asked him why he thinks we don't love other humans, he said we were never taught to love others. In schools, we weren't even taught how to have compassion, empathy, or love for others. As Erich Fromm would say, even love requires learning. Carl Rogers also expressed this idea—that we must learn how to love to have good policies and structures and help each other.

I sometimes think the world needs policymakers and leaders who are more like caregivers than traditional politicians. We need judges, leaders, or teachers who act as caregivers and can truly take care of us. Perhaps the world needs good parents—people who can help others grow, learn to love and feel compassion and empathy.

Jacobsen: This leads to a question about contingency or a dependency on prior conditions. The idea of narcissism, for example. Individuals who have strong personality or psychological profiles in the narcissism scale, based on an expert reporting recently, do not have any potential cures at this time, at least widely accepted. So, if we have created a culture, even in wealthy and well-educated countries, of narcissism, and if there is no immediate cure or fix for this condition, and if these people are characterized by the inability to love both themselves and subsequently others, how do we implement this widely in a society where a hunk of the population who, by definition, will be unable to partake of this?

Yousefi: The idea is that humanistic psychology believes people can change. If we have logical and well-structured policies, the new generation can change. They can change just like we've learned many new things compared to four decades ago.

For example, people's views on feminism and women's rights have evolved significantly in the last five decades. The perception of the LGBTQ+ community has also changed over the past few years. How we approach the environment has also shifted—we are more environmentally conscious than we used to be. Groups of people have been working hard to teach others, encouraging change and growth.

People are much more compassionate and understanding toward individuals with disabilities than 50 years ago. We've changed; we've learned how to change and become better. This same principle can apply to other areas of society—we can learn and change together. It takes time, but it's not impossible. But that's not all. Especially in our market-driven world, if we focus on loving people, empathy, and compassion, everything will eventually improve. It's heartwarming to see that people are constantly learning and changing. We are better than we were 100 years ago.

Things will improve in the next 100 years if we take action and plan for it. Many specialists believe that humanity is moving toward a better future. However, this improvement has only been possible because many people have worked hard to create a better world. Now, more than ever, we need more people to contribute to this progress. Education, in particular, has the power to make a significant impact. If humanistic principles enter the educational system, we will see a major revolution in how we love, live, and strive for peace. I hope for this revolution. I truly hope.

Jacobsen: In faith-based ideologies, the idea is typically to mould someone into a utility for worship. In secular political ideologies, the focus is often on perfecting someone to be useful to the state or the common good. In capitalist and individualistic societies, the orientation is around consumerism, individualism, and turning people into utilities to generate capital. Each of these systems has pathological elements to varying degrees.

From your perspective, it's less about perfecting the person and more about developing the person within a human community. That's an entirely different orientation. Is that the core difference in the humanistic model?

Yousefi: No, it's not just about developing the individual. It's about building a society that works for the development of all humans. A healthy society leads to healthy people, just like healthy people can lead to a healthy society.

Let me explain it this way: societies change through healthy individuals, and healthy individuals contribute to a better society. They have a mutual interaction—healthy society, healthy people; healthy people, healthy society.

Jacobsen: That directly answers my question. The three examples I gave—faith-based, secular political, and capitalist systems—each have an idealized version of a person in mind. However, your approach focuses on the dynamic interaction between the individual and society. The humanistic model works more from the bottom up. It asks, "Where is this person at? How can we develop their capacities based on their temperament?" There's a constant feedback loop between the individual and society. Are there any other aspects of the humanistic model in the 21st century that we should cover?

Yousefi: Not for now.

Jacobsen: What do you think Pink Floyd got right in their commentary and song *The Wall* about the British education system in the 1970s? What did they get right?

Yousefi: What was correct about their critique? It was Pink Floyd's take on how the system had become almost a disaster. *Britannia.* You can still see it—standardization. They showed how students don't need what's predetermined for them to learn. It's a system of control. The controlling state wants to control everyone simultaneously, and that's one of the criticisms they addressed.

Yousefi: He believes that sooner or later, schools will change. We have no other choice but to change; otherwise, societies will collapse from the inside. Education systems try to shape humans, but human evolution won't allow that. The system is already devalued, and we will eventually rid ourselves of it and develop new systems and approaches. He's waiting for that day.

Jacobsen: That's a good final note.

Yousefi: Right.

Jacobsen: Thanks again for your time today. I appreciate it.

Yousefi: Thank you.

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi: The Peace School

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you get funding for these educational efforts in the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Dr. Nasser Yousefi and Baran Yousefi: So, everything is provided by the tuition. We didn't have any extra funding or financial support. The school was supervised by an NGO in Iran. It was a project of this NGO. The NGO provided all the educational programming and everything else. Nothing came from outside the school; it was all within the NGO and the school system.

Sometimes, we held events to provide fun activities, like concerts or art exhibitions, and all the funds gathered from these events were used exclusively for the school. Most of the support and help we received came from volunteers. Many of our operations, educational programs, research, and even teacher training were handled by volunteers. We needed to pay only for basic things, like the rent for the building and our full-time teachers.

Everything we paid for was solely for the students. Aside from the building and salaries, everything else was handled by volunteers. Research, planning, and everything else were done voluntarily. The parents whose children were enrolled in the school also helped. We wanted the parents to be part of the whole system and to participate. When they helped and supported the school, it became important to them. Sometimes, we would ask if they had a party room in their building for events or meetings, if they could help with transportation or field trips, or volunteered for library operations. Anything that could reduce our expenses. The whole project was so interesting to them that they wanted to be involved.

They were so excited about the whole project and the school concept that they didn't wait for us to ask for help; they did it themselves. One of the school's principles was that we believed the whole community was our school. We could use community resources as learning opportunities for our students rather than building or creating new opportunities. We always used available resources provided by families, whether they worked in a company, factory, vet clinic, or lab.

Those opportunities were the best for our students to learn something new. It also decreased our expenses and created more learning opportunities. It helped us create a culture of utilizing available community resources for children. Instead of building something ourselves, we used what we already had. This model could be used in any city, not just the capital or larger cities. It could work in any city based on available resources and people. Looking at it broadly, there are many opportunities for schools to use for their students. It doesn't mean we must create them; they are already available.

This approach also allowed us to have multiple field trips and use community resources. All the libraries in the city were our schools. All the museums were our school. Every company, factory, and store became part of our learning environment. We viewed the entire city as a learning opportunity. It meant that everyone in society was a teacher for us. The museum guide, or guides, yes. They would have been the best teachers, especially for the Museum of History. Or people who worked at the laboratory.

They were the best teachers for biology. We were open to other people becoming our teachers. We were fearless of letting more people join our team and welcomed them as much as possible. Everyone in Tehran, where we were based, was very welcoming to our students and the school. We wanted to hear from them because we respected their talents, abilities, and everything. We wanted

them to be the experts in some situations, and they did everything they could for us. That's why we never encountered any closed doors from the people.

We did face situations where the government closed doors for us, but people were very open and welcoming.

Jacobsen: A few things come to mind. This will be the shortest of the three I have in mind. When people own a school or the educational system and participate that way, did they adopt a motto or slogan within the school?

Yousefi: Yes, the founders had a motto. The school slogan was "Make the world a better place." The teachers never expected anything specific from the students. Still, they always asked them to improve the world for themselves and others, regardless of their jobs or careers.

Yes, it doesn't matter what job or career you follow; you can improve the world. You are not allowed to hurt anyone or make someone else suffer. You need to love others and show empathy and compassion. We tried to teach love and empathy. As teachers and adults, we don't have much to teach students, but we can spread love to them.

Regarding the concerts and other fundraising efforts, we raised funds to reduce operating costs and lower parents' fees. These concerts were private and not publicly announced. Generally, anyone is allowed to hold a concert, but for larger public events, they need a permit from the government. For us, it was different. Women, for example, are not allowed to perform publicly. Our fundraising concerts were all private and spread by word of mouth.

This touches on the third question, which might require a longer response. We did face some pressure and pushback from the government. The main issue was that they didn't recognize us as a school. This meant we couldn't give any diplomas or certificates to our students. So that was one of the issues, yes. The government wants every school to follow its curriculum and textbooks, and the same textbooks are used across the country. It doesn't matter where the school is; every student has to read the same textbook.

That was one of the main issues and pushbacks. One of our biggest challenges was that the government only believed in one system and approach. They didn't even allow an alternative approach to be considered. However, we wanted to continue promoting different and multiple approaches and methods worldwide, and we believed we had to at least look at them. We wanted to promote and support diversity rather than singularity, but the government needed help.

They wanted their system and approach to be seen and recognized. It doesn't matter where you live in Iran, whether in the north, south, east, or west; everyone has to read the same textbook. It doesn't consider their cultural, religious, or political backgrounds. Everyone has to read the same textbook and take the same exams. However, we must consider the child's cultural background, history, language, stories, and even religion in their educational program. Iran has a diversity of religions and languages, and we can't ignore this diversity. You can speak up to one language when there are various languages. In the humanistic approach, we must consider this diversity and these differences. We wanted to do this, and we tried to do it. Of course, we still try to do it, but the government doesn't support it.

Jacobsen: So, no political violence was enacted against any of you, the students, the teachers, or the families. Is that correct?

Yousefi: Violence in the sense that we might usually imagine? No, because we were conducting a research project. The development of this alternative method over twenty years was a massive research project. We always told government organizations we were implementing a research project to expand educational diversity. We always spoke as a group of specialists. However, I believe that the fact that we were never officially recognized and our students were unable to receive an official diploma is itself a form of violence.

Jacobsen: When you're in a highly religiously controlled society, and everyone, regardless of background, has to take these examinations and follow the educational curriculum, what is in it? What do people have to learn? Is it anything connected to the real world? Which parts are useful, and which are nonsense that train people to be effective citizens in a theocracy?

Yousefi: The focus of the schools is, after all, the promotion and expansion of religious thought, specifically introducing students to Islamic teachings. However, Iran is rich in diverse religions, where followers of different faiths have lived together in peace for centuries. When the official education system ignores this diversity and doesn't provide opportunities for dialogue among followers of various religions, ethnicities, or minorities, diversity and plurality are ultimately lost. Of course, followers of religions like Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and others had schools that only enrolled students of their faith. However, there was no interaction between students of different religions within the official education system.

Jacobsen: As part of the curriculum, are kids taught things that aren't useful, like prayer and other religious practices, that might be meaningful to the parents but not necessarily effective for dealing with the realities of life when they grow up?

Yousefi: In mainstream schools, there are subjects for religion and prayer. We don't know how parents feel because we aren't in contact with parents from mainstream schools. Still, we hear they aren't very satisfied with what's happening. We also hear that sometimes their children practice something at school but something else at home, leading to conflicts.

They only study and read to pass exams. They don't necessarily believe what they study. This isn't limited to religious subjects; it includes history, literature, geography, and even science and social sciences. Students memorize the textbooks to pass exams. The textbooks include stories in literature that students have to read, but these are only sometimes the books they choose when they go to the library. We wanted to connect school and personal life, not separate them. It wasn't easy; being honest with yourself and your education while maintaining balance was hard.

Jacobsen: Does the mainstream educational system make any distinctions between Sunni, Shia, Ahmadi, or Quranist interpretations of Islam, or is it all one version?

Yousefi: No, it only talks about Islam in a general sense. Discussions around Zoroastrianism and other faiths are not included. The government has its version of Islam that it promotes. It could be more realistic and accurate; it's just something the government developed.

Jacobsen: A friend of mine is a cosmologist at UBCO and Lethbridge. He's a Quranist Muslim. We've been discussing interfaith topics for a long time. He's big on interfaith dialogues and humanistic interpretations of Islam, which might appeal to secularized individuals. However, this isn't that. I'm a minor figure doing administrative stuff for them. Still, the Canadian Quantum Research Center has a decent number of citations.

Jacobsen: Let's contrast what was described with the mainstream system's method and how it doesn't recognize anything other than a single worldview, and not in an educational sense when

I'm thinking about it. They're taking it as true rather than a secularized world religions class, where they teach what people believe and let you decide for yourself. It's much different. They've pre-decided for you. What's your humanistic approach to this?

Yousefi: We consider religion to be part of a child's background. Many Persian poems have roots in Islam, Zoroastrianism, or even Judaism. So, when you want to learn about Rumi or Hafez, you must also learn about those roots. For example, you can't understand Hafez's poems if you don't know the Torah stories or Rumi's poems without knowledge of the Quran. The same applies to Eastern countries. If you don't know the Bible, you can't fully understand Victor Hugo's or Charles Dickens's stories.

Talking about the Bible, Quran, or Torah is necessary to understand literature and poetry. It doesn't mean we are promoting that religion. Rather, it's about understanding the culture and history needed to grasp something else. The same goes for science. Some scientific concepts have come from Eastern or Western positions or even how we look at evolution. There are different narratives about evolution rooted in religion. Discussing a scientist or physician doesn't mean we are endorsing their religious views. We are discussing their ideas and theories. We only focus on religion as a background context. We don't have a specific subject for religion, but we touch on it to explain the backstory of other topics. If a student is curious about a religion, we open up, considering it a great learning opportunity. But we always respect all religions and those who follow them. We are one of the rare schools with diverse religions, but we never promote any particular one.

We always help students learn more about a religion if they have questions. Some families specifically asked us not to talk about any religion, especially in Iran. However, we could only say yes if a child was interested in learning about Islam or any other religion. We respected their curiosity and taught them about it without promoting it.

In the context of Iran, if you advocate for something other than Islam, there could be negative consequences. But we never wanted to advocate for a specific religion because it would mean we couldn't respect others. We wanted to allow students from other religions to speak freely and be heard. One year, the students themselves asked for a class on religion. We had a program to introduce each religion without advocating for any. We also explained that some people are atheists and don't believe in any religion. We focused on diversity, saying, "This is it," rather than limiting ourselves to one viewpoint.

This approach wasn't limited to religion. It extended to literature and music as well. Some schools only teach one genre of music or one instrument. We introduced different genres and instruments, even challenging ones. We aimed to discuss the best examples in each genre across subjects like arts and science.

If a school restricts everything to one religion or genre, it restricts diversity. We encouraged students to love their country and respect other countries, lands, and nationalities. We never advocated for nationalism or exclusivity.

Jacobsen: So, that's good. This last response will be helpful for those in Canada who may have a stereotype of what Iran is like. There's this ghostly governmental presence that restricts everyone in every way. Can you describe the humanistic model of education, whether about politics, religion or anything else, in a compact way as something like individualistic cosmopolitanism for learning about a wide range of human identities and truths about the world in a semi-autonomous direction?

Yousefi: I am not a representative of the Iranian government, and the government never approved my educational and research work. Therefore, I cannot say what the public schools were thinking or what they expected from this education. Whatever it was, I was critical and opposed to the educational system.

Since the humanistic approach's main objective is respect, it considers every person's aspect and background. It allows people to talk about who they are today, helping them take the next steps. A humanistic teacher is not an ethics teacher; it's not someone who judges people. It's a person who accepts a child in every aspect, in every way possible.

For example, we consider children and see where they stand and what they bring from home, their past, their background, their culture, and everything else. But we don't judge that child and their background. They will never trust us again if we judge them or share their dreams or thoughts. So, we need to accept them as they are, wherever they are, so we can help them take the next steps toward the future.

A humanistic teacher needs to correct the child immediately. We wait long enough to address their mistakes, issues, or misunderstandings. Sometimes, students come with a racist point of view, and we don't stop them immediately. We listen and ask them to talk enough so we can understand where they need help. If we start to correct or judge them immediately, they will stop being honest with us and never share their thoughts. So, language, politics, religion, or nationality are not priorities for a humanistic education. What's important is their characteristics, personalities, emotions, and understanding of the world; we must fully understand them to help them grow and develop. A humanistic teacher is more of a caregiver than a traditional teacher.

It's someone who takes care of the children. We care about policies that support caring for students and children, whether regulations, concepts, or theories. The world needs caregivers more than traditional teachers—not caregivers in the sense of caring for someone ill but someone who genuinely cares for children's development and well-being. But that's where I differ from a behaviourist teacher to a humanistic teacher.

Jacobsen: Is there a risk in teaching students intellectual and analytical skills without a proportional development of emotional and social skills in students? A healthy development of the sentiments to make the intellectual and analytical skills more rounded.

Yousefi: It's both the holistic approach and integrated education. Integrated education means we pay attention to the child's needs immediately. You can't say that you only focus on their cognitive development without paying attention to their nutrition or malnutrition. You can only focus on social skills by considering society's rules and regulations. Cognitive psychology and behavioural psychology both caused the issue of segregating these needs. Cognitive psychology focuses only on cognitive needs and doesn't consider emotional and social needs.

Behavioural psychology only focuses on individual success and forgets that a child is a complex person with different developmental skills and needs. Paying attention to only one aspect and disregarding the others can be dangerous. It could be creativity, reasoning, or analyzing. We need to work on every need and aspect of a child at the right moment. Suppose we skip paying attention to emotional and social needs. In that case, we might end up with scientists who make bombs, promoting war and destruction.

Who's making these bombs and weapons of mass destruction? It's often those specialized individuals who lack emotional and social skills. They never had the opportunity to develop empathy and

compassion. Yes, there are doctors and physicians involved in organ trafficking or mutilation who lack empathy. Where did they go to school? They might have attended very controlling and closed schools that forced them to think about war due to their conditions.

The world's educational system fails to teach people to love each other and empathize; defending any war means going against humanity. Most of the workforce involved in the war, whether in the army, weapons factories, or transportation, attended schools that failed them. Teachers must answer how we taught them and who they became. It's very sad and makes me emotional.

Jacobsen: Let's shift topics so you don't cry. Famously, Professor Noam Chomsky essentially destroyed B.F. Skinner's behaviourism in an 8-page review article. This brought about the cognitive revolution, and humanistic psychology evolved from it. Rogers and other fundamental humanistic psychologists are dead. How has humanistic psychology and humanistic education evolved since its inception, so the cutting edge in the 2010s/2020s?

Yousefi: This person, Noam Chomsky, wasn't the first to write against behaviourist education. He was one of the prominent critics. Maslow, Ferrier, Rogers, and Fromm were all critics of the behaviourist approach. People like Yalom and Pinker also criticize it. I am also a serious critic of behaviourism in my country. We cannot easily overlook a system that harms students' psychology so much. We must raise our voices against behaviourist education.

Some people start questioning it when you shout negatively. I am happy to have been among the few to question behaviourist education. It's good when behaviourist psychologists and educational specialists hear this criticism. Yes, it's like validation that you're doing the right thing—not that you intended to, but you were compelled to.

Scott Jacobsen-Nasser Yousefi Correspondence: Personal Narratives, Ukraine and Iran

Scott Jacobsen: Hi Nasser,

I am living in Ukraine. We're on our last 'field trip' during our 'vacation.'

Dr. Nasser Yousefi: Dear Scott, Since you are currently in Ukraine, I wanted to share a personal experience with you.

When I was 10, a revolution occurred in my country. This revolution forced my generation to grow up overnight. Suddenly, I was pulled from the world of stories, fairy tales, and childhood games into the adult world. The news and events around me and my peers became dominated by various movements happening around the globe. Our books, conversations, and discussions shifted to topics far beyond our age, yet we eagerly engaged with them. We became consumed with issues like anti-colonialism, imperialism, communism, anarchism, and socialism.

Instead of experiencing the joys of first love, I worried about places like Eritrea, Algeria, Palestine, and Afghanistan. Figures such as Martin Luther King, Victor Jara, and Allende became my heroes. I was propelled from reading Andersen's fairy tales and Astrid Lindgren's stories into books on anarchism and socialism. I grew up without choosing to—at the tender age of 10 or 11.

Then, when I was 12, the Iran-Iraq war began—a nightmare that lasted eight years and brought terrifying days for all of us. Just as I was coming to terms with the revolution, I was confronted with the horrors of war, which stole the beautiful days of my childhood.

In high school, teenagers were constantly encouraged to volunteer for the war. Many of my 12 to 14-year-old classmates went to the frontlines. Some were captured, others were killed, and those who returned often came back wounded or disabled.

The nightmare of war overshadowed my adolescence. The innocent love of my teenage years was replaced by the pain and suffering of war—watching friends go off to battle, many never to return. Bombings, missile strikes, and the shortages caused by war haunt my memories to this day.

Then, political repression began in Iran. Some groups started armed resistance against the government. Those young people who were not involved in the war now engaged in violence under the banner of freedom and liberation movements. News of imprisonment and execution, alongside reports of young people dying in the war, tormented my soul.

I was left in shock, wondering what had become of the world. Why was everyone fighting? Why were adults making life so bitter and painful for each other?

I believe I was 15 or 16 years old when I decided to dedicate myself to peace. I wanted to do something to prevent other children from experiencing the suffering I had endured. I realized then that war is not the responsibility of children and, more importantly, that no conditions should ever exist where children are forced to experience war. I consciously chose to dedicate myself to peace when I was just 16.

From that day on, I resolved never to support any war, believing that all wars are against children and humanity.

In my youth, I visited refugee camps in Kurdistan and Afghanistan, trying to help the children there. I remember that during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2000, my friends and I would

visit Afghan refugee camps to distribute toys among the children. No one else had considered that these refugee children also needed toys and storybooks.

Throughout all these years, the news of any war takes me back to the nightmares of my adolescence. When I hear about war and displacement, I think of the children, the young lovers forced to part, the pregnant women, the disabled children, and the families who become refugees, losing everything that defined their lives. Each war breaks me down, and I try to rise again each time and continue working for peace.

Jacobsen: I am struck by the parallels and the rapid coming of age, forced as such, associated with societal trauma. Yours seemed more ideological and informed by examples of heroic exemplars and moral pillars. Actually, no—your Self and extended Self were blown apart by the war. Do you have any contact with these maimed friends now?

Yousefi: The 1979 Iranian Revolution forced my generation to grow overnight. Those older than me, teenagers or young adults, endured even more challenging experiences. As I mentioned, I was only ten years old then, which spared me from some of the direct dangers. Leftist movements deeply influenced the atmosphere of the revolution. Many young people around me idolized figures like Che Guevara, Marx, Patrice Lumumba, or the Spanish revolutionary Zapata. In school, our teachers often introduced us to revolutionary, leftist, and sometimes religious ideologies. Each teacher had their perspective and was eager to align us with their beliefs—topics unsuitable for 10- to 12-year-olds. But the society was so charged, with everyone acting like revolutionaries and fighters, that even kids my age felt compelled to join in.

From 1981 to 1989, during the war and political turmoil, I went through some incredibly tough times. News of friends dying on the front lines, classmates being arrested or executed, or being taken as prisoners of war were too much for a 14- to 16-year-old to handle. I remember those years with a deep resentment towards adults, towards everyone, especially those who started wars. I believe I was experiencing some level of depression. In those years, I turned to literature. I read obsessively everything I could get my hands on. I read all the classics—Tolstoy to Dickens, Victor Hugo to Chekhov. Then, I moved on to more modern works. By age 16, I had read Márquez, James Joyce, and Faulkner. I immersed myself in literature from Latin America to Russia, France, and England. Through these stories, I found solace and tried to heal myself. I also delved into Iranian classical literature, reading the works of great poets and legends from various cultures. I read to escape, to forget the painful reality of where I lived.

Interestingly, the great works of world literature were humanistic and sought peace. The greatest humanist thinkers have often been writers and poets. From Tolstoy to Borges and Victor Hugo to Faulkner, these authors helped articulate human suffering. Later, I read one of Steven Pinker's books about how literature and writers have shaped the humanist movement. I'm grateful that literature saved me during those terrifying years and helped me discover ideals of peace and humanism.

After high school, I decided to study child psychology at university, hoping to create a better world for children. While studying, I wrote stories for children that were published in children's magazines. From the beginning, I wrote stories about peace and love for life. I tried to transform all my society's anger, hatred, war, and animosity into messages of peace for children. Many children's writers focused on war during those years, often validating it or keeping its motives alive. But I swam against this current. I wrote about love, peace, friendship, and the end of all wars.

Many critics at the time thought I was naive or disconnected from reality because I spoke of love and peace in a violent world. They questioned why I would speak of forgiveness and love in such times. In the oppressive atmosphere of war, I couldn't openly say that I wanted to defend life, not war! To some, I was seen as a traitor, a coward, or an idealist. When all prevailing ideologies supported the war effort and wished death upon the enemy, writing about love could easily get you accused of betrayal. But I didn't listen to any of these criticisms. I focused solely on a peaceful life for all children—Iranian, Iraqi, Indian, American, or Russian.

Over the years, many literary critics in my country have asked, "Aren't you tired of writing about peace, love, and friendship? Don't you think it's time to explore other themes?" I'm always surprised by this question because I believe the world desperately needs peace. Whenever I hear news of war and violence in places like Syria, Afghanistan, Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Russia, or anywhere else, the nightmares of war haunt me again. I think daily of parents struggling to keep their children safe, of pregnant women unsure whether to feel joy or sorrow about their child's birth, and of sick, disabled, or vulnerable children whose suffering is amplified by war. I'm baffled when people ask if I'm tired of writing about peace—how should I even begin to answer that?

Interestingly, these same critics are puzzled by the popularity of my stories. They wonder why my books are among the best-selling Persian stories and why parents eagerly seek them out for their children. The love for life and peace resonates with children and their families, which is my best response and greatest reward.

Jacobsen: Much of this reflects the constant narrative of trauma as a potential force for growing up. However, is that supported by developmental psychology? Is trauma conducive to emotional growth, intellectual growth, or both? Intellectually, this seems clear on the cognitive and literary trajectory—to two doctorates. You mention Pinker. I interviewed him about a year and a half ago:

https://in-sightpublishing.com/2023/01/21/interview-with-steven-pinker-by-scott-douglas-jacobsen/

I did a second interview last week with him. With children charged in this way at such a young age, are risks involved in sacrificing the young for the folly of the old, as you stated in the experiential timeline? That's true. Also, some of the most intelligent people, such as John Stuart Mill or Goethe, have been writers. Were the themes of the stories humanistic and peace-oriented?

Yousefi: I truly believe you are an amazing person. Conducting so many interviews with remarkable individuals is truly commendable. I am unsure how much recognition you receive in Canada, but please accept my respect and gratitude.

It's exciting that you interviewed Dr. Pinker. He is one of the most outstanding thinkers of our time. One day, with your help, we could introduce him to humanistic schools and hear his thoughts.

Your question on whether personal or collective traumas can lead to growth and development is tough. Trauma specialists might have better answers, but I'd like to share my personal experiences. However, I'm not sure how valid or applicable they are. As I mentioned, my generation endured widespread emotional pain during the revolution, war, and political pressures in Iran. Similar pain might be felt by young people in Ukraine, Syria, Gaza, Israel, and Russia today.

I don't know if everyone in my generation managed to overcome this pain or if all children involved in wars can forget the nightmares of conflict. Or does the depression from war stay with them forever? I'm unsure, and this topic certainly requires extensive research. However, I was lucky to grow up in a family that took great care of me and provided opportunities to heal through art and

literature. I don't know if all the youth in my country at that time had similar opportunities. The prevalence of nervous disorders, high use of antidepressants, and widespread hopelessness might suggest that not everyone could easily move past these sufferings.

I believe that in individual or collective trauma, people need care, counselling, and emotional support. We must find ways to reconnect those in pain with life as soon as possible.

In 2003, a devastating earthquake struck the city of Bam in Iran. Unofficial reports suggest that nearly 50,000 people lost their lives that night. Thousands of children became orphans overnight or lost their homes and had to live in tents provided by the Red Crescent or Red Cross with their families. I was part of a team supported by UNICEF and a non-governmental organization that organized support programs for the affected children.

Children who lost their parents and those living with their families in tents or camps all experienced different levels of emotional pain and trauma. Relief workers provided basic needs like blankets, clothes, shoes, and food. As with all relief efforts in such situations, these supplies were usually uniform and similar for everyone.

But we decided to do something different. We visited the tents and camps, asking each child, "What do you want? What do you need?" The children asked for items that connected them to life and reminded them of their pre-earthquake lives. They wanted seemingly simple, personal items—a specific type of comb, cup, pillowcase, bedsheet, or shoes they had before. Despite the challenges, we documented each child's needs and searched local markets for what they wanted. We then delivered those specific items to the children, reconnecting them to their lives. This personalized approach to aid gave new life to the affected children.

Additionally, we organized kindergartens and schools quickly with programs tailored to the student's needs, allowing them to talk about their pain or find ways to reduce their suffering through appropriate activities. My colleagues and I later applied this approach to refugee camps, striving to personalize humanitarian assistance for the children.

In truth, every person in pain needs special, individualized care and support. We can't abandon those who are hurting and expect them to heal on their own. I believe that children currently affected by events like war, social violence, and armed conflicts, or even those living in refugee camps, need groups that address their emotional needs. They need personalized care, meaning that merely providing for their basic needs—food, shelter, clothing—while important, is not enough.

Regarding literature and the humanistic movement, I fully agree with Steven Pinker and Rutger Bregman that much of humanistic thought began in literature, with writers allowing readers to empathize with others' suffering through their stories. Pinker argues in his book *The Better Angels of Our Nature* that the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe on the anti-slavery movement was unmatched by any article or speech. Many experts attribute the anti-slavery movement to this powerful story. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* has undoubtedly influenced the greatest peace movements. Similarly, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* led to global attention toward individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The empathy this book fostered was unmatched by any scientific or academic article. Humanistic and peace movements owe much to writers, poets, and artists. The most enduring stories in world literature often celebrate humanity, life, and peace. This is even more evident in children's literature, where the classics celebrate life and humanity. From Peter Pan to Pippi Longstocking and Pinocchio to The Little Prince, all present a worthy image of humanity to children and adolescents.

Promoting good literary works in schools can help students better understand humanistic and peaceful concepts. Teachers can foster empathy and compassion with their students through quality literature. For example, the story *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Canadian author Eleanor Page Coerr evoked more empathy for the suffering caused by war among children and adolescents worldwide than any other movement. Similarly, *L'enfant, le soldat et la mer* by French author Georges Fonvilliers highlighted the love and empathy between people, even when they appear to be enemies.

One of my dreams is to help create an international peace library for children one day, where exemplary peace literature from around the world can be collected. This would help teachers worldwide select good literary examples for their students and organize their educational programs around these books with appropriate activities.

In summary, we have much work ahead of time to educate people for universal peace.

Jacobsen: Part three of the series would cover comparable educational curricula reactions or counters to the behaviourist paradigm, e.g., Montessori. Another might be the moral development and psychology in the curricula, e.g., Kohlbergian moral developmental stages. Is this included in the education? If so, how? If not, why not?

Yousefi: It is well-known that Jean Piaget heavily influenced Lawrence Kohlberg, and he sought to build upon Piaget's framework by extending it to the domain of moral development. Piaget focused primarily on cognitive development, leaving a gap that Kohlberg aimed to fill by delineating specific stages of moral reasoning. Like Piaget, Kohlberg posited that these stages were universal, sequential, and unalterable, applying uniformly to all individuals.

However, this perspective reflects a significant limitation inherent in Piaget's model. This rigid determinism assumes a fixed trajectory for human development. The notion that all individuals must pass through a predefined sequence of stages ignores the complexities of human freedom, agency, and the diversity of moral experiences.

Both Piaget and Kohlberg failed to emphasize that their frameworks were theoretical constructs rather than absolute truths. By presenting their models as universally applicable, they overlooked the possibility that moral development might vary significantly across different cultures, societies, and historical contexts. Morality, after all, is not a static concept; it is dynamic and context-dependent.

Moreover, Kohlberg's "ideal person" conception reflects a distinctly Western and androcentric bias. His model presupposes a male, Western, young, non-disabled individual, devoid of diverse sexual orientations, not an immigrant, and likely conforming to mainstream societal norms. This narrow definition excludes vast segments of the global population, rendering the model less relevant in diverse cultural contexts.

Today, even within Western educational systems, Kohlberg's stage theory has largely fallen out of favour, and it is rarely employed in educational planning or policy-making. Its relevance in non-Western societies is even more questionable, as the model fails to account for the rich diversity of human moral experience across different cultures and communities.

Jacobsen: Are there moral themes in which the "rich diversity of human moral experience across different cultures and communities" can be abstracted and systematized and then done so in accordance in some fashion with the majority of development of the human organism, as the vast majority of the species has two arms, two legs, a torso, emotions, a dorsolateral prefrontal cortex,

hormones, etc.? Thus, we could make statistical evidence-based truistic moral arguments via principles and the arc across the lifespan, e.g., the Golden Rule is manifested in different ways per culture but manifests in a generalized manner without respect to sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, hair colour, religious background, politics, etc. These facets of the Self become reflections of the prism for a "rich diversity" without impacting, in a "statistical evidence-based" moral manner, the universalism about human morality. Similar to international human rights, secular in their nature or detached from any particular religion, while more abstractly based on a principle of universalism, the specific human rights become something for each human person experienced in unique and individual ways.

Yousefi: I've thought a lot about your difficult question. First, we need to reach a common understanding of ethics or perhaps how ethics is defined from the perspective of humanistic education. At the very least, we should be able to explore the concept of ethics within the framework of humanistic education.

In humanistic psychology, a key point might be a good starting place. The idea is that when we talk about humans, we insist on presenting them as real, earthly, and non-sacred beings, recognizing them with all their biological characteristics—without judging these characteristics as good or bad. When modern scientific and social movements discuss "humans,"they refer to a natural, biological being. They emphasize the importance of studying humans in the simplest way possible, accepting all their traits, whether perceived as good or bad. This approach is precise and accurate.

However, when we turn to humanistic psychology, this perspective suddenly shifts, and we associate "humanism" with moral, spiritual, and almost saint-like qualities. A humanist or someone who advocates for humanism is expected not to make mistakes, be spiritual, serve others, not think about economic issues, and always put others first. If they fail to do these things, they are seen as no longer being humanists! This is a strange contradiction.

On the one hand, we view humans as biological beings and accept all their biological traits. Still, when it comes to humanistic psychology, we expect its proponents to be morally and spiritually upright. We even expect them to behave flawlessly in all aspects of their lives.

This raises the question: Why should our "subject"—the human—be seen as a biological entity without judgment, while those who engage with this context are expected to behave spiritually? Suppose a human is not inherently spiritual or moral. Why do we expect spirituality and morality from a psychology that deals with a non-spiritual human?

This contradiction is worth exploring, so it is important to examine ethics within the context of humanistic psychology.

Jonathan Haidt, a humanistic psychologist, believes that the foundation of all ethics, from the earliest humans to today, is rooted in "survival." According to this view, humans created ethics to ensure their survival. This perspective does not see ethics as a spiritual or heavenly matter. Ethics is neither eternal nor unchanging. It developed alongside humanity and will continue to evolve with humanity.

As humans evolved, ethics became part of the process of living. People created ethical standards and gave meaning to them to make life easier and smoother. Therefore, unique ethics were formed in every historical, social, and political period and even within each society. Numerous examples in human societies demonstrate that behaviours considered unethical in one culture may be entirely ethical in another or at least not subject to punishment. What might be a crime in one country may

be seen as a human right in another, with those exhibiting such behaviours enjoying equal social rights.

Moreover, behaviour that was considered ethical in society five hundred years ago may no longer be seen as ethical today. Likewise, there are ethical standards in today's world that people two hundred years ago never imagined. Thus, ethics is an ongoing process of human life. Through ethics, humans can make their lives smoother and better.

However, the main question remains: who or what defines these ethics? Governments? Powers? Religion or social systems? Or the people themselves?

Throughout human history, ethics have become a dreadful affair whenever they were imposed on people by governments or powerful entities. Essentially, the ethics imposed on people were those chosen by the powers, not by the people themselves. These powers imposed their ethics to maintain their social position, giving them a spiritual or heavenly veneer, and punished anyone who deviated from them.

Therefore, and with this understanding, any principle or rule that helps people live better lives can become part of the ethical flow of that society, provided that:

- The people themselves play a role in shaping those ethics.

- People can talk about those ethics.

- They can critique them.

- Change them.

- Reform them.

- Eliminate them.

- Or even create new ethics.

Thus, anything that can undergo this process and remain open to change and reform is, in the humanistic framework, an ethical matter that deserves attention.

People define ethics and give them meaning. Ethics change with people.

In this sense, we, in educational centers associated with humanistic programs, have a system of ethical thought. We even strive to create new ethics within these centers. For example, human rights and all the rights recognized for humans over the past century or two can be part of this new ethics. Rights for people with disabilities, women, children, the elderly, sexual minorities, refugees, and ethnic groups, as well as attention to cultures, subcultures, intangible heritage, the environment, animal rights, and so on, are all part of this new ethics—ethics that have become important in this era of human life and may change in the centuries to come. Some aspects may be discarded, and new ones may be added.

With this in mind, we also strive to:

- Share these ethics with our audience.

- Shape new ethics to support and sustain our programs.

- Continuously engage in dialogue about these ethics.

- Recognize that no ethical current is absolute and unchangeable, and always be ready for change.

- Always keep open to the possibility of changing anything through dialogue.

Sometimes, our audience (teachers and students) disagreed with or opposed ethics that were important to the whole organization. We all had the opportunity not to think like the group.

For example, we insisted on following a healthy eating model in our food program. Providing healthy food—like low-salt, low-oil foods with less sugar, avoiding foods with industrial additives, and using a variety of food products—was an ethical matter for us because caring for human health was an ethical issue for us.

However, some students and even teachers did not like this model. In different situations, they welcomed unhealthy foods or showed that they were acting against them.

In all these cases, we were patient. We entered into dialogue. We allowed time. We worked on the issue for a long time. We provided more information or even changed methods.

So, we should return to the initial question of why many expect humanistic philosophy to be moral yet view humans as earthly and non-spiritual beings. In that case, we can speak of human-centred ethics.

Humanism, despite its belief in humans' naturalness and fundamental view of them as earthly beings, nonetheless believes that humans are not just a collection of bones, nerves, and muscles.

Humanism has always been about creating a better life for oneself and others. Modern humanistic thought speaks of a decent life for all humans, especially in contemporary times. Every human being deserves the best living standards, and providing these standards for all is, in itself, an ethical act. When we strive to ensure that humans can enjoy social, political, economic, and cultural rights, it is an ethical endeavour.

Working for a fair, just, and respectful life for humans is an ethical act. Attention to micronutrients, preservation of the mother tongue, respect for a culture's intangible heritage, citizenship rights, and participation in life affairs are all considered ethical.

Therefore, if we align the meaning of ethics with modern human rights perspectives, humanistic education is very ethical, and we are working and planning towards that end.

Jacobsen: Do you think the Amsterdam Declaration 2022, or even 2002, provides a decent humanistic universalist ethics?

I do not know if I subscribe to this idealized version of humanistic ethics. (I am unsure if this is rhetorical because it makes a broader philosophical point.) The empirical infusion into ethics and the study of human nature makes human beings a complex rather than an idealization, where the humanistic principles become a manner to strive and improve while making mistakes and having successes on the road to creating a more humanist world. Anything spiritual would be limited to the naturalistic or non-supernaturalistic, which highly constrains the options. Right there, the paradox seems nullified with a simple switch.

I see the point in connecting Haidt and others to bring this down to Earth. It's a fair representation of a naturalistic humanist ethic.

Yousefi: In general, I am supportive of national and international agreements. I even value "agreement" over "unity" in participation and democracy. To me, the agreement is a mature and evolved concept, and to build a peaceful society, individuals and grassroots groups need to come to agreements consciously. However, it seems that many prefer the idea of "unity" over "agreement."

The Amsterdam Declaration represents a start toward reaching a consensus on the principles and foundations of humanism. It may not be perfect, and it may have weaknesses, but I believe it is important to continue discussing it and contributing to refining its vision.

My concern is that many intellectual ideas or innovations, once formalized and structured, unfortunately, become dogmatic. When groups document new movements or ideas and derive laws, principles, or models from them, those principles often become rigid and unchangeable. Worse yet, in some cases, these principles become ritualistic—a set of repetitive customs, traditions, and practices. Sadly, in some countries, even ideologies like communism have turned into rituals or religions.

Humanism has taken on characteristics similar to a sect or religion with specific rituals in some groups. The only difference is that they are non-theistic. However, they still adhere to fixed practices like marriage, childbirth, naming conventions, and funerals. This is my personal view, and I am unsure how accurate it is. Still, philosophical ideas should not become rigid doctrines. When something becomes a doctrine, it becomes difficult to change and can imprison those within its framework. Krishnamurti eloquently spoke about creating new forms of bondage, noting that while we may set aside the gods of traditional religions, we create new ones and surround them with rituals. The core philosophy, however, should always remain dynamic and evolving. I am not a philosopher, so this is a matter best left to them.

If the Amsterdam Declaration is intended to lay the groundwork for ethical behaviour within humanist communities, I would like to share my experiences regarding ethics as a teacher and facilitator in humanist schools. These experiences are entirely personal and rooted in the context of a school environment, and I make no broader claims beyond that.

In the early years of our school's operation in Iran, we worked closely with teachers to emphasize respecting students' needs, focusing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, over time, the concept of children's rights and attention to student rights in general began to be met with skepticism from many colleagues and even from families.

Parents and teachers began raising concerns about morality and respect, claiming that students were behaving disrespectfully because they were becoming aware of their rights and that many of their actions were immoral. This continued to the point where nearly every student's behaviour was suppressed under the guise of being "immoral." Even parents had their specific definitions and boundaries regarding this issue.

In response, we organized educational workshops and brainstorming sessions with teachers and parents separately. These sessions lasted for several months. In these workshops, we reflected together on key questions such as:

How do we define morality?

What actions are considered moral or immoral?

Where is the boundary between moral and immoral behaviour?

Who decides what is moral or immoral?

What sources or authorities should we refer to when determining moral behaviour—laws, religion, government, experts, religious leaders, public opinion, or society?

Should only the majority of society decide what is moral? Can minorities in a society define moral standards?

If governments enact laws related to morality, does that automatically make those laws moral?

Where and how should students learn about moral matters?

How much do our behaviours influence the development of morality in students?

If a student acts immorally, what should be done?

We had numerous discussions on these topics separately with teachers and parents. We aimed to understand their perspectives on what they considered moral or immoral. Naturally, all families and teachers emphasized the importance of ethics. Still, it was clear that no one had a uniform definition of morality. The symbols and examples of morality differed for each group and were sometimes contradictory. Each group considered their circumstances justified and referred to their standards as the only moral ones.

For instance, teachers often viewed not completing homework or lacking responsibility toward classwork as immoral. At the same time, parents did not necessarily see these as immoral. On the other hand, if their child neglected household responsibilities, bothered younger siblings, disrespected household rules, or protested certain regulations, parents considered those actions immoral. Our discussions revealed that teachers and parents felt disrespected or saw behaviour as immoral when their standards, expectations, rules, or beliefs were ignored. For teachers and parents, actions like not feeling responsible for classmates, not caring about others' feelings, bullying, or not participating in group activities were often not considered immoral. Many families and teachers defined morality as simply maintaining predetermined, hierarchical relationships.

Sometimes, the standards and expectations among teachers were different. For example, one teacher allowed students to sit on desks instead of chairs, which did not bother them, whereas another considered this behaviour immoral. Similarly, the boundaries of morality varied significantly between families, between families and teachers, and among teachers themselves. Through these discussions, all teachers became aware of these differences. We realized how diverse and inconsistent our rules were and how these differences could create conflicts and contradictions for students, requiring them to constantly learn and adapt to each teacher's varying rules and standards.

In our discussions, we understood that when students ignored the individual rules of teachers or family rules, they were often labelled as behaving immorally. For many adults, it did not matter whether students showed empathy toward others, felt responsible for others' suffering, made efforts to protect the environment, were concerned about food waste, or respected differences. Many adults, whether teachers or parents, mainly wanted children and adolescents to follow their rules, be obedient, and fulfill the responsibilities they set promptly. For many teachers and parents, good morality in students meant being obedient, not opposing, and doing whatever they were told.

We repeatedly discussed with whom students should learn moral behaviours. We concluded that when parents or teachers themselves engage in immoral behaviours, it is unreasonable to expect children and adolescents to behave morally. When adults start wars, support wars, participate in the production of weapons of mass destruction, contribute to environmental degradation, or promote xenophobia, how can we expect students to act morally?

On a simpler level, when school teachers do not collaborate, compete with each other, or show favouritism among students, or when neighbours in a community do not know or care for each other, how can we expect children and adolescents to behave morally?

I recall that many years ago, UNESCO's office in Paris held a seminar on the issue of students showing disrespect towards teachers. Almost all speakers highlighted instances where students were disrespectful to teachers and even endangered the teachers' safety. However, only one speaker pointed out that for hundreds of years, teachers and educational systems have disrespected students, always using the language of threats, dismissing their dreams and aspirations, and insisting on compliance with rules. Even today, in some parts of the world, punishment, reprimand, and even corporal punishment are still used against students. Throughout these hundreds of years, no one ever organized a seminar to discuss why teachers and educational systems disrespect students and why they continually create unsafe environments for them. Now that some students are resisting this oppression, we label their actions as disrespectful and immoral.

For this reason, in our participatory school with a humanistic model, we always tried to engage different groups in discussions around every rule and every moral principle. We talked with students, teachers, and parents. We tried to think together about what is moral or immoral. We explained our perspectives to each group and listened to theirs. As a result, we rarely observed immoral behaviours among our students. When they felt heard and understood, anyone did not need to display unpleasant behaviours.

At the same time, we always knew that the principles and rules we have today are subject to change and that we can develop new rules through dialogue. Laws and ethics evolve with people. Morality is shaped by people and should contribute to improving lives. Morality should not be defined for us by those in power.

These powers are not just governments, armies, or religious leaders. Sometimes politicians, international organizations, NGOs, schools, universities, parents, and even students can become powers and mafias. Anyone who denies others the opportunity for dialogue and any movement that does not listen to others in its principles will eventually become a power that can damage relationships.

Therefore, powers that do not allow for change are the most unethical foundations of any society, regardless of who or what they may be.

Jacobsen: You have noted much of the advanced literature read as a child to escape. However, most children have more potential than expressed, but few have the natural gifts in language to that degree.

I suspect large swathes of war-torn youth have a similar landscape outside as inside their minds after the war. I was going to interview a girl after Poltava on the day of the major attack on the site. A psychologist was treating her, and the mother said she couldn't as it was too traumatic.

Maybe the family is a substantial buffer or bubble from this pain. It's like exercise is comparable to the use of antidepressants to treat depression.

I am reminded of the tsunami in Sri Lanka in the 2000s, killing over 200,000 people. All died for nothing. Many may disassociate for the rest of their lives. Brain plasticity is not infinite.

It's thoughtful to individuate people's needs in terms of wants and needs based on their expressed desires. However, that seems difficult to scale up in large-scale humanitarian disasters.

With attacks on libraries, an online humanist library for peace and children might be possible. This could be organized.

Yousefi: I truly believe you are an amazing person. Conducting so many interviews with remarkable individuals is truly commendable. I am unsure how much recognition you receive in Canada, but please accept my respect and gratitude.

It's exciting that you interviewed Dr. Pinker. He is one of the most outstanding thinkers of our time. One day, with your help, we could introduce him to humanistic schools and hear his thoughts.

Your question on whether personal or collective traumas can lead to growth and development is tough. Specialists in trauma might have better answers, but I'd like to share my personal experiences. However, I'm not sure how valid or applicable they are.

As I mentioned, my generation endured widespread emotional pain during the revolution, war, and political pressures in Iran. Similar pain might be felt by young people in Ukraine, Syria, Gaza, Israel, and Russia today.

I don't know if everyone in my generation managed to overcome this pain or if all children involved in wars can forget the nightmares of conflict. Or does the depression from war stay with them forever? I'm unsure, and this topic certainly requires extensive research. However, I was lucky to grow up in a family that took great care of me and provided opportunities to heal through art and literature. I don't know if all the youth in my country at that time had similar opportunities. The prevalence of nervous disorders, high use of antidepressants, and widespread hopelessness might suggest that not everyone could easily move past these sufferings.

I believe that in individual or collective trauma, people need care, counselling, and emotional support. We must find ways to reconnect those in pain with life as soon as possible.

In 2003, a devastating earthquake struck the city of Bam in Iran. Unofficial reports suggest that nearly 50,000 people lost their lives that night. Thousands of children became orphans overnight or lost their homes and had to live in tents provided by the Red Crescent or Red Cross with their families. I was part of a team supported by UNICEF and a non-governmental organization that organized support programs for the affected children.

Children who lost their parents and those living with their families in tents or camps all experienced different levels of emotional pain and trauma. Relief workers provided basic needs like blankets, clothes, shoes, and food. As with all relief efforts in such situations, these supplies were usually uniform and similar for everyone.

But we decided to do something different. We visited the tents and camps, asking each child individually, "What do you want? What do you need?" The children asked for items that connected them to life and reminded them of their pre-earthquake lives. They wanted seemingly simple, personal items—a specific type of comb, cup, pillowcase, bedsheet, or shoes they had before. Despite the challenges, we documented each child's needs and searched local markets for what they wanted. We then delivered those specific items to the children, reconnecting them to their lives. This personalized approach to aid gave new life to the affected children.

Additionally, we organized kindergartens and schools quickly with programs tailored to the student's needs, allowing them to talk about their pain or find ways to reduce their suffering through appropriate activities. My colleagues and I later applied this approach to refugee camps, striving to personalize humanitarian assistance for the children.

In truth, every person in pain needs special, individualized care and support. We can't abandon those who are hurting and expect them to heal on their own. I believe that children currently affected by events like war, social violence, and armed conflicts, or even those living in refugee camps, need groups that address their emotional needs. They need personalized care, meaning that merely providing for their basic needs—food, shelter, clothing—while important, is not enough.

Regarding literature and the humanistic movement, I fully agree with Steven Pinker and Rutger Bregman that much of humanistic thought began in literature, with writers allowing readers to empathize with others' suffering through their stories. Pinker argues in his book *The Better Angels of Our Nature* that the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe on the anti-slavery movement was unmatched by any article or speech. Many experts attribute the anti-slavery movement to this powerful story. Tolstoy's War and Peace has undoubtedly influenced the greatest peace movements. Similarly, Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury led to global attention toward individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The empathy this book fostered was unmatched by any scientific or academic article. Humanistic and peace movements owe much to writers, poets, and artists. The most enduring stories in world literature often celebrate humanity, life, and peace. This is even more evident in children's literature, where the classics celebrate life and humanity. From Peter Pan to Pippi Longstocking and Pinocchio to The Little Prince, all present a worthy image of humanity to children and adolescents. Promoting good literary works in schools can help students better understand humanistic and peaceful concepts. Teachers can foster empathy and compassion with their students through quality literature. For example, the story *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Canadian author Eleanor Page Coerr evoked more empathy for the suffering caused by war among children and adolescents worldwide than any other movement. Similarly, L'enfant, le soldat et la mer by French author Georges Fonvilliers highlighted the love and empathy between people, even when they appear to be enemies.

One of my dreams is to help create an international peace library for children one day, where exemplary peace literature from around the world can be collected. This would help teachers worldwide select good literary examples for their students and organize their educational programs around these books with appropriate activities.

In summary, we have much work ahead of time to educate people for universal peace.

Jacobsen: What was your role in the team supported by UNICEF?

Yousefi: I thought about your question about my role in the UNICEF team to care for children in the Bam earthquake:

The Bam earthquake in 2003 in southeastern Iran was one of the most devastating natural disasters the Iranian people had faced in a century. Between 50,000 and 70,000 people lost their lives. Nearly half of the city's population perished on the night of the earthquake, and tens of thousands were injured. During this crisis, UNICEF Iran played several important roles. In the early stages, they focused on supporting children who needed immediate care. I was part of this team, and together with several NGOs, we established a center that coordinated efforts from dozens of child-focused organizations across the country to support affected children.

Instead of allowing each group to work separately, we organized a joint program to manage public donations and aid. Early on, we realized that a one-size-fits-all approach wouldn't work, so we moved toward tailoring the support to meet the specific needs of camp children.

We understood that larger organizations, like the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, were addressing the collective needs of the affected populations, which was commendable. However, with the help of a large group of volunteers from nearby cities, we focused on identifying the unique needs of children in the camps. We discovered that some children required specific medications, others had lost eyeglasses, and a few needed wheelchairs. We made special arrangements for each of these children.

Next, we focused on helping the children reconnect with their previous lives by providing them with personal items or symbols. They wanted things like their old bags, toys, notebooks, coloured pencils, and even clothes they used to wear. These items helped them feel a sense of normalcy and connection to their past lives. After some time, the children began to express their collective needs—requests for playgrounds, group movie screenings, libraries, and the reopening of their kindergartens and schools. We made sure to include these needs in our planning.

Although it was a challenging task, we could implement these plans thanks to the large number of volunteers. For me, this experience was a significant learning moment. During the relief efforts for children in Bam, I discovered a humanistic approach to aid. I realized that, just like education, relief work must start at the individual level. In the same way, education needs to be personalized, and so does humanitarian assistance. While it is important to address immediate individual needs, the goal is to gradually shift toward meeting collective needs. Once people's basic needs are met, they naturally seek to fulfill their needs within a social environment alongside others.

Children needed personal items to reconnect with life in the early days following the earthquake. Later, they sought to be part of a group to meet their individual and social needs in the company of peers. Humanistic education follows a similar path. We shouldn't confine children to personalized learning environments or focus solely on their needs. Over time, all children and adolescents need to be part of a group, and they actively look for shared experiences and needs among their peers.

I've seen this shift from individual to collective and participatory learning in many projects I've worked on in various communities. When we acknowledge, respect, and give students the space to explore their needs in any setting—whether in schools, kindergartens, or universities—they eventually seek collaboration. They try to understand and align themselves with their peers. When people see that their needs are respected and opportunities are provided, they become equally eager to help meet the needs of others and participate in communal efforts.

I strongly advocate for this approach today and use it as a guiding principle in humanistic education. However, behaviourist or cognitivist education systems often ignore human needs. These systems use rigid, predetermined concepts that suppress individual needs, leaving no room for students to explore or experience them. Since students are forced to suppress their deeper needs, they fail to discover collective needs and cannot connect with the group.

This is why many schools worldwide produce graduates who are self-centred, individualistic, and detached from their communities. Yet, today's world needs people who can collaborate, empathize, show compassion, and work for the collective good. I'm pleased to see that many humanist philosophers, thinkers, theorists, writers, and journalists are actively engaged in developing this ideology. Their philosophical insights help educators like me promote humanistic schools and move this movement forward.

Jacobsen: I am curious about how highly religious societies handle natural disasters or 'acts of God' versus human-made catastrophes. It's both an academic import and a personal query about mass psychology in disaster. It's an evolution too. As you noted, the declarations can make things static. I researched their collective a while ago, but I see the concern. There are common threads, though, as seen in other documents carrying 'the spirit' of humanism, such as the UN rights documents: Freedom of religion and belief without reference to the gods or religions for justification. That makes human rights truly agreed upon by secular universalist ethics. We're close to a century of that, where even highly religious countries must reference them to make an actionable impact at the international policy level.

Yousefi: I don't have precise information about the relationship between natural disasters and religion, and I'm not sure what various religions believe about natural events. However, divine punishments are often described in holy books as suffering and pain. So, for some people, natural events like floods, earthquakes, and volcanoes might be seen as signs of God's anger.

Aside from religious views, some traditional perspectives see natural disasters caused by human actions. In some villages and small communities in Iran, for example, disabled children are sadly sometimes seen as a symbol of a sin committed by their parents. There is also a widespread belief in places like Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Tibet that human actions are not without consequences. The idea of karma is taken seriously in this part of the world. We have a proverb in Iran: "He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind." Or another one: "You receive from the same hand you give." These sayings show that many believe our actions will eventually have consequences. Because of this, some believe that unpleasant natural events are also related to human misdeeds.

Today, due to environmental destruction, the country I come from faces new kinds of natural challenges. When forests are destroyed, or farmland is turned into cities, we see floods coming down from the mountains. When the government allows construction near rivers, buildings are destroyed by floods. Overuse of groundwater causes the Earth to sink. Factories dumping waste into rivers lead to diseases. This could be the kind of karma people in the East believe in.

But I think a lot of this is connected to the education system and its philosophy. Our education systems often focus on individual success and self-interest. Schools teach students that they should do anything for personal gain. Consumerism, greed, and profit-driven mindsets are ultimately harmful to humanity.

In many Western countries, schools don't always teach these harmful values, but some of these dangers are avoided due to strong laws. It's similar to democracy. Many schools in the West don't focus on teaching democracy or democratic behaviour consistently. Students might take one unit on democracy during their 12 years of education. Still, concepts like democracy, participation, human rights, and a culture of peace are not practiced regularly or systematically. However, since these societies have democratic structures and laws, people are naturally led to behave democratically. Good laws, fair enforcement, and dedicated execution help make democratic values part of everyday life.

Fair laws and agreements are a good start if I relate this to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Laws that are created with people and evolve with them have a greater impact. Western countries have strong planners and policymakers who have "architected" their societies. They have established democracy and democratic culture nationally, which is why their legal systems work the way they do. But this doesn't mean that in democratic countries, students practice democratic

behaviour every day at school. Understanding human rights, eliminating gender discrimination, and protecting the environment cannot be fully learned in a one-hour class. You can't claim that students are fully aware of human rights or democratic principles after a few workshops. These concepts must be practiced daily, monthly, and yearly.

In our humanist schools, we work with students on these values daily. For example, students lived with these ideas in our school in Iran. Unfortunately, they couldn't always see these values reflected in society outside of school. This is why we tried to expand the students' surroundings, involving the local community. We connected students with groups, organizations, and communities that shared these values. We were always working to expand the community around the students. This is one of the principles of humanist schools: involving the larger community in the educational process so that they can also contribute. However, this was difficult because we didn't live in a democratic society.

That's why good, fair, and civil laws are essential for shaping proper behaviour among citizens. But this alone is not enough. Citizens must also practice democratic behaviour every day. Schools and universities are great opportunities for this practice. Every democratic society needs a set of ethics or laws to ensure that citizens can live peacefully. International conventions could be a good basis for forming this modern ethic.

Jacobsen: Oh, I see. I recall some ethics courses with a Christian theologian as a teacher. He was really big on differentiating natural killing by nature and human murder, where nature makes the problem of evil particularly sticky.

That's interesting. I recall some fundamentalist television Islamic preacher saying that if women drive, then this will cause earthquakes or something silly - uncertain about the source. In my opinion, these and other forms of magical thinking, if in the public and the education system, are devastating to the clearheadedness of a culture. Creationists are a good example here. All this is a further reminder that our views on the world and scientific perspectives are, in fact, uncommon, if not rare, when taking the global population into account. We're the lucky few.

You may be unsurprised to know that many small, rural communities in Canada harbour the same nonsense, too. Your narratives are further motivation to combat supernaturalistic nonsense, whether the God of the Bible or variegated concepts like karma. Their concept of karma sounds more like Divine Law as something akin to the ethical equivalent of Action at a Distance in physics, where comeuppance eventually happens for individuals and people groups. Our understanding is more causal and correlative in a quasi-materialistic sense in Naturalism.

The notion of pure Capitalism isn't as absurd as Marxism to me, in two senses; as for General Relativity and Special Relativity, we do not need Einsteinism, a point from Chomsky years and years ago. At the same time, certainly, what is termed East and West dichotomization, in the West, we value these things too much and have earned the epithet of a materialistic society because we are a consumerist society. The high emphasis on individualism without social responsibility determines a decline in the degree to which we practice local activism and community building, potentially–contributing to the Commons.

"I think Western countries have strong planners and policymakers who have 'architected' their societies. They have established democracy and democratic culture nationally, which is why their legal systems work the way they do. But this doesn't mean that in democratic countries, students practice democratic behaviour daily at school."

I like this statement, as it encapsulates the issue of how economic or political materialist ideologies seen in some West destroying local community democratic work while many East theocratic regimes simply have fewer robust national democratic setups or simply have fewer than the West.

Yousefi: I would like to expand on why it's important to work with students on human rights, democracy, and peace.

In Canada, educational experts and professionals, whether in universities or the Ministry of Education, often don't see the need to familiarize students with concepts like democracy, peace, or participation. These topics may be covered in an optional high school course, briefly mentioned in a notice, in a workshop, or as part of a lesson. There are usually two main reasons for this:

The first reason is that we live in Canada—a free and democratic country where peace and freedom are already present. As such, there's no perceived need to actively work towards these goals, as they're not seen as issues that affect our students. The second and perhaps more important reason is that concepts like peace, participation, democracy, and human rights are not viewed as foundational subjects. Instead, they are often considered a topic within broader subjects like social studies.

In other words, the traditional mindset in education still limits itself to core areas like science, math, literature, art, and history. Each area may have subtopics, but the core remains the same. This is true not only in Canada but in many other countries as well. Peace, democracy, or participation are seen as "topics" within a subject like social studies rather than as overarching values. Experts don't always view these concepts as educational philosophies or guiding principles. Instead, the focus is often on the transmission of knowledge, which is why exams and quantitative assessments become central—because they measure knowledge transfer.

When education is reduced to transmitting facts, grades, rankings, and scores become the primary way to assess learning. Exams are the only language parents, teachers, and even education experts understand. Much like how a bank account tells you how much money you have, how much you've spent, and how much you need, exams offer a similar measurement of knowledge. This is why Paulo Freire argued that the evaluation systems in behaviourist schools are modelled on banking systems—school administrators communicate with families in the same transactional terms that banks and insurance companies use. This approach, however, lacks depth and meaning.

In contrast, humanistic schools treat concepts like peace, democracy, human rights, participation, and the common good as the foundation of their philosophy. Democracy and participation are not just techniques—they're ways of life. These values need to be woven into the fabric of daily school life. Students need to practice and experience them consistently across all subjects. Otherwise, they won't apply these principles in their future careers or social interactions. For example, a doctor needs to understand the importance of fairness in medical practice. An engineer must be mindful of sustainable development and justice. A businessperson should prioritize collective well-being, and artists or researchers should consider human rights. Without this integration, everything risks centring around individual gain, self-interest, and conflict.

Another important point, often overlooked by Canadian education officials, is that a significant portion of students come from immigrant families. Many of these families have little or no experience with democratic governments. How many major immigrant groups currently residing in Canada come from democratic countries? Many of these students, or their parents, have never experienced democracy. A large number have fled war-torn regions, filled with anger and resentment towards the violence they escaped. These students often have no experience with human

rights, peace, participation, or democracy. And even if they do, these concepts require consistent practice and reinforcement.

An educational system must treat these values as core principles, not just as techniques or one-time lessons.

Authors' Biographies

Dr. Nasser Yousefi is a child psychologist and a humanistic educational specialist with degrees from various universities in Europe and the United States. However, for him, the hands-on experience working directly with people, children, and families far outweighs any academic qualifications. He combines a strong academic foundation with an unwavering commitment to children's rights, fostering inclusive and nurturing learning environments worldwide. Dr. Yousefi served for many years as an educational consultant for UNICEF, conducting educational and research activities for various groups of children, including immigrants, minorities, street children, and children with special needs. From 2005 to 2023, he was the Principal of the Peace (Participatory) School in Tehran, Iran, graduating 500 students from kindergarten through high school, with graduates accepted at universities in Europe, the United States, and Canada. The school was never officially recognized by the Iranian Ministry of Education, meaning that its students were unable to obtain government-issued diplomas. After twenty years of educational work, Dr. Yousefi, encouraged by several international organizations, sought to share his educational environment and pedagogical model with other countries. The Peace School in Canada is new, founded and accredited by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2023. Currently, the school has five children, with a capacity for 120, and is well-financed and supported by the parents of the children attending. Canada was Dr. Yousefi's first choice for the next Peace School. Dr. Yousefi is passionate about creating the best possible future for children and is dedicated to building safe and nurturing learning environments based on holistic principles.

Ms. Baran Yousefi is a graduate of York University's School of Health Policy and Management. Her early academic interests leaned heavily towards the natural and social sciences, leading her to choose a university major that integrated these fields. She pursued her passion at York University in Toronto, where she earned an Honours BA in Health Studies. Ms. Yousefi's academic journey has been enriched by specialized courses, including the United Nations intensive program on Sustainable Development Goals, as well as studies focused on the healthcare of Indigenous peoples in Canada, quality and safety in healthcare, and the ethical conduct of research involving humans. As a graduate of the Peace (Participatory) School in Tehran, Ms. Yousefi profoundly understands its unique and transformative educational approach. Ms. Yousefi oversees the day-to-day management of The Peace School. Together with Dr. Yousefi, she is actively training the school's teachers in the pedagogy of the Tehran school and establishing the learning conditions and environment that have attracted success and international attention. Ms. Yousefi's educational leadership and organizational skills are already being recognized. Most recently, she was invited to represent the school and its pedagogy at the "All Means All" workshop, which brought together leading experts at the forefront of alternative education. The month-long workshop at the University of Bremen in Germany was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and organized by three European universities (Germany, Ireland, and Italy).

Scott Douglas Jacobsen is the publisher of In-Sight Publishing (ISBN: 978-1-0692343) and Editor-in-Chief of *In-Sight: Interviews* (ISSN: 2369-6885). He writes for *The Good Men Project*, *The Humanist*, *International Policy Digest* (ISSN: 2332-9416), *Basic Income Earth Network* (UK Registered Charity 1177066), *A Free Inquiry*, and other media. He is a member in good standing of numerous media organizations.