

# GIOVANNI BOSCO AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MASTER-APPRENTICE RELATIONSHIP PERSPECTIVE

## Upbringing implications in view of work with socially-maladjusted youth

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### Introduction

It is difficult to perceive the teacher-student relation as a master-apprentice one in the contemporary upbringing reality of school or other educational institutions. Post-modernism has negated in a certain manner the importance of straining for perfection and for that reason any afterthought on the roles of a master and apprentice in upbringing seems to be groundless.<sup>1</sup> Still, in the context of a Polish pedagogy, there are scholars interested in a dialogue-oriented perception of the teacher-student relation, viewed as the one of master-apprentice.<sup>2</sup>

The author of this article wants to explore the phenomenology of Giovanni Bosco's encounter with his pupils. He also wants to explain two explorative issues: a) what are the characteristic features of Giovanni Bosco's relations with his pupils and what are the resulting implications, and b) how socially-maladjusted youth perceives their educator and how such teacher-student relations fit into the category of the master-apprentice dialogue?

Not only contemporary scholars of the Bosco's prevention system but also documents of the Salesian Society<sup>3</sup> still encourage a new perception of the system, particularly in view of working with socially-maladjusted youth.<sup>4</sup>

The elaborations in the first part are theoretical and have been conducted on the basis of the available literature on the subject-matter. In the second part, the author presents the results of his own studies, conducted among socially-maladjusted boys in the Salesian Youth Education Centre in Trzciniec (Poland).

<sup>1</sup> K. OLBYCHT, *Współczesne pytania wokół relacji „mistrz-uczeń”*, <http://gazeta.us.edu.pl/node/194851> (access: 20.09.2014).

<sup>2</sup> See R. KWIECIŃSKA, M.J. SZYMAŃSKI (ed.), *Młodzież a dorośli. Napięcia między socjalizacją a wychowaniem*, Akademia Pedagogiczna, Instytut Nauk o Wychowaniu, Kraków 2001.

<sup>3</sup> DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE SALESIANA, *La Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana. Quadro di riferimento*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Roma 2014, p. 83-85.

<sup>4</sup> See M. BORSI, *Sistema preventivo e resilienza: un possibile e fecondo dialogo*, "Salesianum" 2(2011) Aprilis-Junius, p. 309-332; F. CASELLA, *L'esperienza educativa preventiva di don Bosco. Studi sull'educazione salesiana fra tradizione e modernità*, LAS, Roma 2007.

## **1. Phenomenology of Giovanni Bosco's encounter with his pupils – educational implications**

While exploring the character of Giovanni Bosco's relations with his pupils, it must be stated that those were not prosaic encounters just to meet the boys or learn about their family or material situation. Looking at Bosco's relations with his pupils, both in the context of a school and oratorio, it is possible to notice something exceptional. Not only did those encounters emanate with empathy towards the boys, but above all else they were filled with a metaphysical content, that is, they elevated a common interpersonal relation onto a higher level, they revealed a new meaning of existence, they helped pupils realise who they are and what task and duties they faced in life.

### **1.1. *Giovanni Bosco comes into pupils' everyday life***

The analysis of the literature on the preventive system allows us to claim that Giovanni Bosco encountered his pupils during their specific life situations (irregular/casual jobs, living on streets, searching for place to sleep, etc.). Bosco had been devoting his time for such boys since his own youth. As a young priest, he met young people in their environment, organising first oratorios and workshops.<sup>5</sup> The consequence of meeting boys in their life situations was a continuous accompaniment in their life path, directed towards a complete, optimal and integral development in social, spiritual and intellectual dimensions.<sup>6</sup> This accompaniment revolved around the concept of implementing a complete and protagonism-oriented subjectivity of pupils.

### **1.2. *Encounters characterised by a readiness to "experience" another person***

Giovanni Bosco's encounters with young people fit perfectly into the principle of a dialogue, promoted by M. Buber. He stated that a human beings becomes "I" only after encountering "You".<sup>7</sup> Those encounters were characterised by a family atmosphere, affirmation of a human being, helping pupils build their sense of dignity. It may be stated that such encounters accommodated the exchange of thoughts and gifts which was mentioned by John Paul II and which led to pupils' self-fulfilment.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, (ed. E. Ceria), SEI, Torino 1946, wyd. 8.

<sup>6</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS, Zürich 1964.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. k, *Das Problem des Mensch*, tr. R. Reszke, *Problem człowieka*, Wydawnictwo Aletheia-Spacja, Warszawa 1993, s. 29.

<sup>8</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, *Encyklika Ut unum sint*, n. 28, [http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan\\_pawel\\_ii/encykliki/ut\\_unum\\_1.html#m0](http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/encykliki/ut_unum_1.html#m0) (access: 11.10.2014).

The analysis of the literature on the subject-matter confirms the belief that Giovanni Bosco's encounters with young pupils bear the features of a master-apprentice type of encounter filled with search for the truth about a pupil, the encounter that encourages to assimilate a higher level of personal, spiritual and social conduct. These encounters of a master and an apprentice were not a mere exchange of courtesies, but as they happened in the form of a dialogue between a tutor and a pupil, they encouraged the latter to self-reflect and undertake work on one's self-development.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. *dialogue between a master and an apprentice in terms of "becoming" a more mature human being*

Contemporary scholars emphasise that the necessary condition for becoming the master is the fact of transferring values, respecting other person's beliefs and providing support to a young human being.<sup>10</sup> Referring to a dialogue between a master and an apprentice, J. Tischner stresses the necessity of "following the footsteps", as the essential experience of the apprentice is walking on the path trodden by the master.<sup>11</sup> Bosco's encounters with the youth were always filled with educational proposals. Young people were encouraged by the tutor to gain the ability of "becoming", to constantly undertake work on oneself.<sup>12</sup> The educational dialogue with pupils, initiated by Giovanni Bosco, always had the features of personal development, self-creativity and experiencing own subjectivity.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.4. *Encounters with Giovanni Bosco orienting towards true values*

Another dimension of the master-apprentice relation is the functioning as a master, a personality pattern which enables orientation towards the values. A human being is an axiological creature. Values are one of the most important things that human beings acquire during their lifetime. No person is born with a pre-established reference to the world of values, because they are transferred by means of an example, upbringing.<sup>14</sup> In the opinion of the scholars, a tutor must be a witness of values<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Filosofia dell'educazione*, PAS, Zürich 1967, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. K. OLBRYCHT, *O roli przykładu, wzoru, autorytetu i mistrza w wychowaniu osobowym*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2007.

<sup>11</sup> J. TISCHNER, *Mistrz i uczeń*, <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wwwylacznie/mistrz-i-uczen/bxt4x> (access: 22.09.2014).

<sup>12</sup> G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. L. CIAN, *"Il Sistema Preventivo" di don Bosco e i lineamenti caratteristici del suo stile*, LDC, Leumann (Torino) 1985, p. 199.

<sup>14</sup> Por. M. MALICKA, *Dać ludziom pragnienie*, w: *Edukacja aksjologiczna*, ed. K. Olbrycht, vol. IV, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 1999, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> T. GADACZ, *Wychowanie jako spotkanie osób*, in: *Człowiek – wychowanie – kultura. Wybór tekstów*, ed. F. Adamski, WAM, Kraków 1993, p. 113.

and a transferor of truth, because the aspiration to the truth is the highest good in upbringing.<sup>16</sup> According to T. Gadacz, only in the master-apprentice relationship, does the character of the tutor “constitute a call, to which pupils respond with a free and personal reaction and follow their master on the path towards the highest values.”<sup>17</sup> These observations may serve as a specific criterion for understanding of the master-apprentice relationship in the axiological dimension with reference to Father Bosco and his affiliation with young people. In Bosco’s upbringing practice it is possible to notice above all else an enormous engagement to the benefit of young people and their education to values as well as prioritising a pupil as a human being.<sup>18</sup> In the recalled system, Father Bosco strongly emphasised the transfer of positive values, the forming of system of values based on Christian religion and philosophy. In Bosco’s relations with young people, it is possible to notice the concern to familiarise young people with transcendent values and encourage them to take an approach of openness and acceptance of such values.<sup>19</sup> As an educator, Father Bosco favoured the formation of the attitude of conscience in pupils as well as a personal responsibility for the shape of one’s own life.<sup>20</sup> The person of Giovanni Bosco as a master appears as an intriguing, delighting person, provoking to undertake effort to adhere to values which guarantee the self-realisation of humanity in young people. Being a master figure for his pupils meant that Father Bosco refused to take a central point of attention of his pupils. Constant references to truth, freedom and choosing good and love somehow make boys seed their lives in Christian values.<sup>21</sup>

### *1.5. The role of authority in the master-apprentice relationship vs. optimal personal development of pupils*

As understood and defined by pedagogues, educational authority originates in an adult person. Having a certain moral prestige and living in accordance with ethical principles, such an adult person is involved in upbringing of a young generation. Being a guide and master, the adult helps a young person to accept norms which become essential in building the young person’s own personality as a protagonist.<sup>22</sup> Authority is bound to a personal structure of a human being, and thus, as noted by

<sup>16</sup> W. WOŁOSZYN, *Deontologia a kształtowanie pedagogicznej relacji rodzina-szkola*, in: *Pedagogiczna relacja rodzina-szkola. Dylematy czasu przemian*, red. A.W. Janke, Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSP, Bydgoszcz 1995, p. 115.

<sup>17</sup> T. GADACZ, *Wychowanie*, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE SALESIANA, *La Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana*, op. cit., p. 82-89.

<sup>19</sup> P. RICALDONE, *Oratorio festivo, Catechismo, Formazione Religiosa*, SEI, Torino 1940 p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> G.B. LEMOYNE e altri, *Memorie Biografiche di Don (del Beato- di San) Giovanni Bosco*, S. Benigno Canavese - Torino 1898-1948, vol. 6, p. 390.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. LEMOYNE e altri, *Memorie Biografiche*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 605.

<sup>22</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Autorita’ educativa*, <http://dizionariofse.unisal.it/index.php?method=section&action=zoom&id=133> (access: 24.09.2014).

W. Stróżewski, “you cannot have authority, you must be one.”<sup>23</sup> In the literature, the authority is presented in moral, epistemic<sup>24</sup> and liberating dimensions, encouraging autonomy in pupils.<sup>25</sup> In this view, Bosco’s prevention system is a method which presents an attractive perspective for pupils and their development in growing and fulfilling their “Self”. The efficiency of this measure depends upon tutor’s authority and upon the quality of his presence among pupils,<sup>26</sup> the latter being founded upon tutor’s moral power. Hence, it is about the authority which has substantiation and which becomes attractive and tempting standard for pupils in terms of life example and due to a perspective of participating in axiological opulence represented by the tutor. Such authority in the prevention system is described as the “authority of presented good”, a “complete devotion to pupils” and “guidance” in their personal development.<sup>27</sup> To be an authority and, what follows, to ensure adequate upbringing conditions for pupils means to be an inspiration and encouragement for pupils’ internal development. It means to be an external assurance of achieving things which would not be accessible if students were to be left on their own.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Some clarifications on methodology of author’s own studies

The scope of my own studies was how pupils in the Salesian Youth Education Centre in Trzciniec perceive their tutors. The study was conducted by means of the dialogue method, between March and June 2014. The dialogue was unstructured and direct, and the selected technique was individual conversation, based on active listening. Out of 80 pupils, 20 were selected, in the 14-18 age bracket. The pupil selection criteria were as follows: a) the longest time of living in the centre; b) boys who identified their problems as “serious” and those with less complicated issues. The aim of the study was to present pupils’ opinions about their tutors-teachers. Thus, the study focus revolved around the vision of a tutor and his role in young people’s lives. In addition, boys were encouraged to determine the extent, to which their relations with tutors may be perceived as a master-apprentice relationship.

<sup>23</sup> W. STRÓŻEWSKI, *Mała fenomenologia autorytetu*, “Ethos” 1997, no 1, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> M. ŁOBOCKI, *Autorytet nauczyciela jako warunek pedagogicznej relacji rodzina-szkola, w: Pedagogiczna relacja rodzina-szkola. Dylematy czasu przemian*, ed. A.W. Janke, Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSP, Bydgoszcz 1995, p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> J. SCHEPENS, *Autorytet wychowawców*, „Communio” 1992, no 3, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> G. BOSCO, *La lettera alla comunità salesiana dell’Oratorio di Torino-Valdocco. Roma, 10 maggio 1884*, w: *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, ed. P. Braido, LAS, Roma 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Por. P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco Educatore*, Colle Don Bosco, Asti 1951, vol. I, p. 290 e 310.

<sup>28</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Filosofia dell’educazione*, op. cit., p. 181-185; See also P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco Educatore*, op. cit., p. 63-72.

### **3. Perceiving adult tutor by socially-maladjusted boys – study results**

a) nearly all boys taking part in the study claim that there is no significant other (parents, foster-parents) in their lives who could become a reference point to them. They regrettably state that the figure of mother or father induces negative associations (experiencing physical abuse, no material care, no relations founded upon good feelings and parental love, bad life examples, encouraging to commit minor thefts, abandoning children and going abroad, alcoholism, etc.). The pupils say that it is parents who in a way are the cause of their tragedy.

b) during the first few weeks of staying in the centre, pupils display general aversion towards tutors-teachers, which originates from schools or other upbringing centres. The majority of pupils feel no remorse about the deeds committed in the past. In such circumstances, pupils appreciate the attitude of tutors, who do not stigmatise young and socially-maladjusted boys, but they rather try to empathically emerge in pupils' world, their problems, values and motives, thereby becoming someone trustworthy and dependable.

c) the first phase of a contact between pupils and tutors-teachers is characterised as "irritating". The care institution is perceived as a "difficult reality". As a part of the Salesian assistance, the constant presence of tutors among the boys triggers certain concerns of meeting someone adult who might demand, instruct, enforce religious rituals and require change of life. With time, it is that contact, gradually becoming "more bearable", which allows pupils to hope that it is possible to live in the facility and change one's life and attitude towards other people and the society.

d) pupils appreciatively find that, unlike in other secular institutions, the tutors in the Salesian Centre do not use physical violence, which allows young people to perceive them in a different manner, that is, gain trust to tutors as well as accept better the applied prevention system of Giovanni Bosco.

e) upon the conducted interviews it is possible to claim that pupils quite frequently perceive the relation between them and the tutors as the master-tutor relationship. Boys appreciate the attitude of tutors towards them. Pupils claim that adults in the centre create conditions for a true upbringing, based upon principles of rationality, religion and pedagogical love. Accusations of tutors for lack of empathy are very rare. No pupil has experienced physical abuse from a tutor.

f) the boys emphasise an enormous importance of tutor's presence in the institution. Assistance of tutors as well as a regular contact with the adult person changes pupil's negative image of adults. Previous situation in home or family of the majority of boys had established their conviction of being rejected, unwanted and unaided. Upon positive relations with a tutor, who is interested in their lives and their past, pupils rebuild the vanished trust towards parents and adults. Boys gradually familiarise themselves with a presence of a positive character in their lives. They gain conviction that cooperation with an adult person is beneficial for creating their own future and re-entering social life.

g) interviews with the boys have proven that tutors try to emphasise pupils' subjectivity, prioritise young people and encourage them to assume the position of a protagonist in relation to one's life and upbringing. The boys admit that tutors strongly encourage pupils to make them trigger their initiative, their talents and positive features in working on themselves. Some remarks of the pupils about tutors who are irritating or who behave like supervising police officer and are inaccessible seem to be marginal. These claims are typical of the boys with the shortest residence period in the centre or those who had experienced some sort of a rehabilitation trauma in another facility.

h) boys admit that the contact with a tutor is positive also in the area of values. By means of conversation, school classes, trips, camps or physical work, adults guide pupils towards the values previously unknown to them: kind self-perception (viewing oneself in a better way), establishing friendly relations with peers, sense of duty, devotion to oneself and others, finding the value of physical work in lives of human beings, noticing the importance of religious and patriotic values in human life.

i) the conducted interviews have revealed that the socially-maladjusted pupils, influenced by contacts with their tutors, are slowly beginning to accept moral and social standards. With time, some tutors become adequate reference point, a kind of authority. However, some admit that in many instances tutors replace their parents, becoming a kind of a guide concerned about the best possible development of a pupil and stimulating undiscovered goodness in pupils.

j) pupils notice that tutors' efforts have a goal of enabling young people to gain an autonomy based upon responsibility for one's future. Boys state that upbringing strategies applied in relations with youth as well as activities and attitude of the majority of the tutors are favourable for the boys who undergo resocialization and who above all else may build their new, own identity.

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