

JOURNAL OF SALESIAN STUDIES

July – December 2015

Volume 16, Number 2

© 2015 – Salesian Society (SUO)

ISSN 2333–4061 (print)

ISSN 2333–4118 (online)

Subscription information and digital versions available online at:
SalesianJournal.org

A semiannual journal founded in 1990 and published by the

INSTITUTE OF SALESIAN STUDIES
DON BOSCO HALL | BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

*a work of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales
USA - West*

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The Preventive System and Child Rights

More than a Tool for Working with Children with Behavioral Difficulties

by Jose Kuttianimattathil, SDB

The Salesians, who have been applying the Preventive System since the time of their Don Bosco, have understood it mostly as a method of education. However, when we re-read the Preventive System from the perspective of rights, we realize that it is a Child Rights friendly system. We see ingrained in it many of the Child Rights. Therefore by using the Preventive System for working with the young, we promote the rights of children and facilitate their integral development. It is also a system that is effective in dealing with children with behavioral difficulties as Don Bosco developed it while working with children who were marginalized in various ways.

Our exposition is divided into two parts: Part I will deal with Preventive System and Child Rights and Part II will deal with the application of the Preventive System to deal with children having behavioral difficulties.

PART I: The Preventive System and Child Rights

The Preventive System is a way of accompanying the young and educating them that was developed by Don Bosco. Through it, Don Bosco aimed at forming spiritually mature and socially responsible persons, in his own words, “good Christians and honest citizens”.

All human beings have basic rights as codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations on 10 December 1948.¹ Normally when we think of human rights we think of adults. But not only adults, children too have rights. However, because children are small and dependent, adults often do not think of them as having rights. In order to ensure that children would be considered as having rights – and that these rights would be respected – the United Nations adopted a Declaration of the Rights to the

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/60UDHR/bookleten.pdf>, accessed 23-02-2014.

Child² on 20 November 1959. This became the basis for a more elaborate enunciation of the rights of the child set forth in the Convention of the Rights of the Child³ adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989. This Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force on 2 September 1990. Basing themselves on these declarations various countries, like India, have elaborated further the rights of children through laws like the “Juvenile Justice Act” (2000/2006), the “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education” (2009), and “The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act” (2012).

Relationship Between the Preventive System and Child Rights

Don Bosco was not a social activist or social philosopher in the strict sense.⁴ He worked with children with behavioral difficulties, mainly young people who had migrated to the city of Turin in search of work. He did not speak in terms of ‘rights’ in the sense that ‘rights’ are understood today. But he promoted certain principles and ways of acting which are very much in agreement with what we understand as Child Rights today. Through the tabular presentation that is given below, we point out certain parallels between the principles and ways of acting promoted by the Preventive System and the Declaration of Child Rights. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child proclaimed by the United Nations on 20 November 1959 speaks of ten *principles* rather than *rights*. It may be said that what the United Nations speaks of as ‘principles’ can be understood as ‘rights’ or that the ‘rights’ are enshrined in these principles.

2. Declaration of the Rights of the Child, http://www.unicef.org/barbados/spmapping/Legal/global/General/declaration_child1959.pdf, accessed 18-02-2014.

3. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf, accessed 18-02-2014.

4. Francis Desramaut, *Spiritualità Salesiana: Cento Parole Chiave* (Roma: LAS, 2001), 344.

<p>UN DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD</p>	<p>PREVENTIVE SYSTEM OF DON BOSCO</p>
<p><i>Principle 1</i></p> <p>“The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration. Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.”</p>	<p>“The purpose of this oratory is to keep boys busy and away from bad companions, especially on Sundays and holy days. Therefore, any boy may be admitted regardless of social condition... Poor, abandoned and uneducated boys are particularly welcome...”ⁱ</p> <p>“The Love of the Lord has boundaries, and does not exclude anyone, whatever his age, condition or religion. Among our young ... we have had and we still have, those who are Jews.”ⁱⁱ</p>
<p><i>Principle 2</i></p> <p>“The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.”</p>	<p>“An educator is one who is consecrated to the welfare of his pupils, and therefore he should be ready to face every difficulty and fatigue in order to attain his object, which is the civic, moral and intellectual education of his boys.”ⁱⁱⁱ</p> <p>“The first overriding principle when applying any form of discipline should be directed to the question: Will the child profit from the punishment?”^{iv}</p>
<p><i>Principle 3</i></p> <p>“The child shall be entitled from his birth to a name and a nationality.”</p>	

<p><i>Principle 4</i></p> <p>“The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health; to this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.”</p>	<p>Writing to Francesco Crispi, the Minister of the Interior, on 16 February 1878 Don Bosco told him that “one comes into contact with those who are poor and abandoned, and who lack the wherewithal to feed and clothe themselves, or to find a place to sleep at night. There is only one way of providing for them: with hostels and safe places which have arts and crafts, and also by means of agricultural schools.” He also suggested that the government should help Don Bosco to build hostels, to buy the necessary tools and equipment, and provide subsidy for the poor.^v</p> <p>“Many boys from Turin and the surrounding country were perfectly prepared to lead an upright, hard-working existence, but, when urged to do so, they often replied that they had no food, no clothing and no place where they could stay even temporarily... Realizing that all efforts would be wasted on some children unless one provided shelter for them, I hastily began to rent room after room in boarding house, often at exorbitant prices.”^{vi}</p>
<p><i>Principle 5</i></p> <p>“The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given special treatment, education and care required by his particular condition.</p>	

Principle 6

The child for the full and harmonious development of his personality needs love and understanding. He shall, wherever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents, and, in any case, in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material security, a child of tender years shall not save in exceptional circumstances, be separated from his mother. Society and public authorities shall have the duty to extend particular care to children without a family and to those without adequate means of support. Payment of State and other assistance towards the maintenance of children of large families is desirable.

“...education is a matter of the heart...”^{vii}

“The youngsters should not only be loved, but they themselves should know that they are loved.”^{viii}

“Our concern is for the under-developed peoples, for poor children, for those members of society most in danger. This is our real wealth which no one will envy and no one will take from us.”^{iv}

<p><i>Principle 7</i></p> <p>“The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgment, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.</p> <p>The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance, that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.</p> <p>The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right.”</p>	<p>“At St Francis of Assisi (1841-44), I was already conscious of the need for some kind of school. Some children who are already advanced in years are still completely ignorant of the truths of the faith.... At the Refuge and later at the Moretta house, we started a regular Sunday school (besides catechism, children were taught to read, write, and work with numbers), and when we came to Valdocco we also started a regular night school.”^x</p> <p>“These boys must be given free education. Some need to be given free scholastic materials like books, paper and pens, while others also need food and clothing. These private efforts cannot continue without some sort of special subsidy.”^{xi}</p> <p>- Don Bosco was the first to start an evening school in Turin (1844).</p> <p>“The first overriding principle when applying any form of discipline should be directed to the question: Will the child profit from the punishment?”^{xii}</p> <p>“Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run and make as much noise as they please. ... Let care be taken however that the games, the persons playing them as well as the conversation are not reprehensible.”^{xiii}</p>
<p><i>Principle 8</i></p> <p>The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief.</p>	

<p>Principle 9</p> <p>The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form.</p> <p>The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.”</p>	<p>“To strike a boy in any way, to make him kneel in a painful position, to pull his ears, and other similar punishments, must be absolutely avoided, because the law forbids them, and because they greatly irritate the boys and degrade the educator.”^{xiv}</p> <p>“...we must never use coercive means. Always and only, persuasion and kindness.”^{xv}</p> <p>At the time of Don Bosco child labor was common. He did not speak against it. But through the “work contracts” which he drew up with the employers, he made sure that the youngsters were treated in a humane way. He was the first to have work contracts drawn up for young apprentices in Turin.^{xvi}</p>
<p>Principle 10</p> <p>The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.</p>	<p>Salesians are not to “let their hearts be stolen by one individual and neglect all the other boys to cultivate that particular one.”^{xvii}</p> <p>The goal of Salesian education is to make the pupils “good Christians and honest citizens.”^{xviii}</p>

Key to Reading the Tabular Presentation

What the tabular presentation intends to show is not that Don Bosco said exactly what the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child says. The UN Declaration speaks from a socio-political context whereas Don Bosco spoke from a socio-religious context. Hence the languages they use are different. Don Bosco made his contribution when the concept of rights was beginning to be articulated (second half of the 1800s), whereas the UN had the benefit of much serious reflection on rights. Don Bosco spoke in terms of the young

people under his care (restricted, limited scope) whereas the UN Declaration is universal in scope.

What the tabular presentation tries to show is that many of the things that the UN declared as rights of the child were things close to the heart of Don Bosco and things which Don Bosco tried to ensure for his youngsters.

Thus the first principle of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child states that all children, without any exception and without being discriminated against in any way are entitled to all the rights. A similar mentality of non-discrimination and openness to all is manifested by Don Bosco when he says that all young people without any exception are welcome to his youth center and that his services are available to all without anyone being excluded on account of social status or religious affiliation.

The fourth principle of the UN Declaration states that the child “shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.” Don Bosco did not state that these are rights of children. But when he saw that many were homeless, without adequate nourishment and recreational facilities he took steps to provide these. He considered them as important for the welfare of children. In other words, in relation to children both Don Bosco and the UN Declaration manifest the same concerns although they express them differently.

Basic Principles on Which Child Rights and the Preventive System are Based

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights made by the UN in 1948. The principles on which the Human Rights are based are given in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Don Bosco’s System of Education is also based on certain principles which he has articulated at various times. The following table presents the principles on which Human Rights and Don Bosco’s System are based:

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS	PREVENTIVE SYSTEM
<p>Article 1</p> <p>“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”</p>	<p>“When God created the soul, he breathed on the human being and gave it the spirit of life. This breath is simple and spiritual, made in the image and likeness of God, who is eternal and immortal... God gave our soul freedom.”^{xix} The preventive system “is based entirely on reason and religion, and above all on kindness...”^{xx}</p>

The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states the basic principles on which all the rights are based. It states that human beings are born free, are equal in dignity and rights and that they are endowed with reason and conscience and are capable of acting towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood.

Don Bosco would be perfectly in agreement with this. He holds that humans are created in the image of God. What this implies is that all humans are equal as creatures of God and that all have equal dignity as images of God (= as persons), as children of God. As children of the same God, we are all brothers and sisters to each other. According to him, the Preventive System is based on reason, religion and loving kindness, the three characteristics of human beings affirmed by the Universal Declaration, namely ‘reason’, (= endowed with reason), ‘conscience’ (= religion), and the ability to “act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (= loving kindness). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not mention ‘religion’ explicitly in art. 1. But it mentions conscience, which in the religious terminology familiar to Don Bosco would be ‘the voice of God.’

The tables that have been presented above make us draw the following conclusions: (1) The basic principles on which the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Preventive System of Don Bosco are based are practically the same. (2) The Declaration of the Rights of the Child and Don Bosco’s Preventive System manifest similar concerns with regard to the well-being and integral development of the child. (3) The Preventive System embodies many of the rights proclaimed in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. (4) Although Don Bosco did not mention or stress some of the things enunciated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, he would have

had no difficulty in accepting them. (5) Since there is so much in common between the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Preventive System of Don Bosco they can support and enrich each other.

Mutual Support and Enrichment

We have seen that Child Rights and the Preventive System have much in common. They have the same goal, namely the integral development and total well-being of children. Hence they can support each other and be enriched by each other. Here are some examples of how this can be done:

What Preventive System Can Offer Child Rights

Preventive system is a way of accompanying the young and educating them. Child Rights can find in it an effective way of dealing with the young that respects their rights.

The Preventive System gives visibility to Child Rights (right to education, right to leisure, right to be dealt with without corporal punishment), making it easy for Child Rights to be understood and practiced in everyday settings.

The Preventive System creates a “culture of rights.” This means that where the Preventive System is practiced there exists an environment in which rights are respected and promoted and where the environment prevents the violation of rights. The environment is made up of persons, resources, values, and activities which allow youngsters—even the poorest and the most abandoned—to grow integrally in a joyful ambience. Don Bosco said that the Preventive System “places the pupils in the impossibility of committing faults.”⁵ This is done not by curtailing the pupil’s freedom but by strengthening the ‘affective’ atmosphere that surrounds the pupil so that the pupil is not driven to do anything wrong. For example, the Preventive System creates an environment of love. It is more difficult to violate the rights of others in an environment of love than in an environment of indifference or hatred.

What Child Rights Can Offer the Preventive System

Child Rights can offer the Preventive System legal support as well as sanctions so that the Preventive System may be practiced with greater seriousness. Child Rights can promote the Preventive System as one of the model ways of dealing with children, a way that is Rights-promoting and child friendly. Child Rights can offer the Preventive System a language (terminology) that is understood everywhere. For this, the Preventive System will have to re-express itself in the language of Child Rights.

5. John Bosco, “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young,” in *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales* (Editrice S.D.B: Rome, 1984), p. 251.

Tasks Ahead

Both Child Rights and the Preventive System will be able to accomplish their goals on behalf of children better if the following aspects are paid attention to:

Spiritual Care: Principle 2 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child speaks about the right to grow spiritually. This, perhaps, is an aspect we do not stress much. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* states:

The worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship... Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.”⁶

Unless children are helped to meet their need for God, they will not become really free. Speaking in a Catholic context Don Bosco said:

Frequent confession and communion and daily Mass are the pillars which must support the edifice of education, from which we propose to banish the use of threats and the cane.⁷

Religion can be a great help for the promotion of rights.

Formation of the Staff: Speaking of children who create trouble Don Bosco says: “I have often summoned such disruptive youngsters, treated them kindly, and asked them why they were so intractable. Their defense was that they were being picked on or that one superior or another was hounding them.... This leads me to say with some pain that we ourselves have always had our share of responsibility for their guilt.”⁸ At times it is because the adults violate rights that the young have recourse to unhealthy behavior. Hence, there is great need for forming well those who give care to children.

Creating a Healthy Atmosphere: If we let a child grow surrounded by thieves it is very likely that the child will also become a thief. The UN Declarations and the various Government Acts speak of rights. But, as our Rector Major *emeritus*, Pascual Chávez Villanueva points out “our societies ... accept and even justify the destruction of embryos, which are not considered to be human beings, commercialize ovules and sperm; consider masculinity and femininity as simple cultural ‘genders’; they would like to see assisted

6. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Carmel International Publishing House: Trivandrum, 2013), no. 200.

7. “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young,” p. 249.

8. *BM*, XVI, 370.

death as a noble choice; with irritating public exhibitionism they present a particular notion of sexuality, which permeates everything, even obsessively so; they spread pornography as a legitimate form of entertainment.”⁹ If the society in which we live is a society that violates rights with impunity and also glories in it in some way, and we do not do anything to change it, how can we hope that rights will be respected in such an ambient? For rights to flourish there must be a ‘culture of rights,’ and environment that promotes, upholds and defends rights.

Developing Guidelines for Positive Discipline: It is the right of a child to be corrected and helped to grow in the right way. This demands that we develop guidelines for positive discipline or affirmative action, that is guidelines for assisting care givers to teach the children while respecting their rights.

Protocol for the Protection of Minors: Each institution dedicated to the care of children should draw up and put into practice a protocol for the protection of minors, and see that it is known and applied by Salesians and all the lay collaborators involved in our works. In this context the work done by the Salesians in different parts of the world is really praiseworthy and is often used by other Congregations as a model for drawing up a protocol for their own provinces.

PART II: The Preventive System and Children with Behavioral Difficulties

The common behavioral difficulties of children may be grouped as psychosocial behaviors (e.g., aggression, problems at school), habit disorders (e.g., thumb sucking, head banging), anxiety disorders (e.g. anxiety and fearfulness as for example fear to go to school, or obsessive-compulsive disorder), disruptive behavior (e.g., stealing, lying, truancy) and sleeping problems (e.g., too much or too little sleep, waking up frequently).¹⁰ Counseling, therapy and medicine will propose appropriate ways for dealing with these cases.

Don Bosco did not have the advantages of the studies and insights of the numerous helping sciences that we have today. Psychology as a separate science started only in 1879 when Wilhelm

9. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, “The Vocation to Remain Always United to Jesus to Have Life,” in *Acts of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco*, no. 408 (September-December 2010), p. 10.

10. “Common Behavioral Problems in Children” <http://www.patient.co.uk/doctor/common-behavioural-problems-in-children>, accessed 12-04-2014.

Wundt set up the first laboratory for psychological research at Leipzig, Germany. By that time Don Bosco was almost at the end of his life; he died in 1888. So, it would be futile to search for *systematic elaborations* of the insights of later psychologists and therapists or even a seminal awareness of *one or other of their findings* in Don Bosco or in the system that he proposed. Don Bosco developed his system based on the insights of educationists before him and on his own personal observation and experience. However, the method that he advocated anticipates many of the insights that would later be articulated by psychologists and therapists for dealing with persons with problems. Having compared the insights of persons like Freud, E. G. Williamson, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Kurt Lewin, Erich Fromm, Viktor Frankl, and Lawrence Kohlberg with that of Don Bosco, Abraham Panampara observes: “The data analyzed show some striking similarities between Don Bosco’s basic postulates and those of educators who went before him and of psychologists who came after him. Many of these basic postulates which needed to be convincingly and concretely affirmed in his day are today widely accepted in educational theory.”¹¹

Positive Discipline: Basic Approach for Working with Children with Ordinary Behavioral Difficulties

It would be a herculean task to compare the Preventive System with the theories of child care and counseling proposed by different psychologists and therapists and to show that preventive system is in keeping with their insights or that it is flexible and open enough to incorporate their findings. Instead of doing that we shall see how the Preventive System is in agreement with the concept of Positive Discipline as articulated by Joan E. Durrant,¹² who bases

11. A. Panampara, *A Glimpse into Don Bosco’s Educational Method in the Light of Modern Guidance and Counseling* (Sacred Heart College: Tirupattur, n.d.), 189.

12. Joan E. Durrant, Ph.D. is a Child-Clinical Psychologist and an Associate Professor of Family Social Sciences at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. She conducts research on the factors that lead parents to strike their children, as well as on the impact of laws that prohibit physical punishment. Dr. Durrant was the principal researcher and co-author of the Canadian *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*; a member of the Research Advisory Committee of the *United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children*; and a co-editor of *Eliminating Corporal Punishment: The Way Forward to Constructive Discipline (UNESCO)*. Active in public education, Dr. Durrant has written parenting materials for the Canadian government, and has conducted workshop in many countries on parenting and child related issues.

herself on the findings of the best psychologists, counselors and therapists of our time and respects the vision of the United Nations on the rights of children. In a book that she prepared titled *Positive Discipline: What It Is and How to Do It*, she points out how parents can fulfill their duty to discipline their children without violating their rights. This book draws on the research done on child development and effective parenting and takes into consideration the recommendations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. In this book Durrant deals with how parents/care givers can deal with the ordinary behavioral difficulties found in children. She is not dealing with behavioral difficulties that would need the intervention of a specialist. However, even a specialist will have to respect the general principles that she articulates. What would be specific to a therapist would be mostly the type of therapy used (i.e. Gestalt or REBT).

Positive Discipline “is an approach to teaching that helps children succeed, gives them information, and supports their growth.” It “is non-violent and respectful of the child as a learner.”¹³

Durrant says that Positive Discipline focuses on the following:

Positive discipline *is* about long-term solutions that develop your child’s own self-discipline.

Positive discipline *is* clear communication of your expectations, rules and limits.

Positive discipline *is* about building a mutually respectful relationship with your child. Positive discipline *is* about teaching your child life-long skills.

Positive discipline *is* about increasing your child’s competence and confidence to handle challenging situations.

Positive discipline *is* about teaching courtesy, non-violence, empathy, self-respect, human rights and respect for others.¹⁴

13. Joan E. Durrant, *Positive Discipline: What It Is and How to Do It* (Save the Children Sweden: Bangkok, 2007), 2.

14. Durrant, *Positive Discipline*, 6.

Positive Discipline is based on principles, namely: focusing on identifying long-term goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think, feel, and solve problems.¹⁵

Brief explanation of the Positive Principles

Identifying Long-Term Goals: In their interaction with children parents have short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals are goals that parents want to achieve right now (e.g. getting dressed quickly, stopping the game). Long-term goals are skills/goals that parents want their children to achieve by the time they are grown up (e.g. being kind and helpful, being courteous, being non-violent). If you beat the child because it is not getting dressed quickly (short-term goal), it will learn to beat others to get things done, when it is grown up (the long term goal of being non-violent is not achieved). So, in their interaction with children, parents should focus on long-term goals while at the same time trying to achieve the short-term goals.

Providing Warmth: By providing warmth, is meant offering the child a comfortable atmosphere conducive for its integral growth. This includes providing emotional security, unconditional love, verbal and physical affection, respect for the child's developmental level, sensitivity to the child's needs, and empathy with the child's feelings. Children want to please those who love them. So, providing warmth will encourage short-term compliance and teach long-term values [if they are loved, they will do what you ask them (short-term goal) and they will learn to love (log-term goal)].¹⁶

Providing Structure: Providing structure means giving and explaining the boundaries/parameters within which the child is expected to act. This includes clear guidelines for behavior, clearly stated expectations, clearly explained reasons, support to help the child succeed, encouragement of the child's independent thinking and dialogue (negotiation). This helps the child to understand what is important. It helps the child to see the mistakes it has made and to correct them. It teaches the child how to negotiate with another one when there is a disagreement and solve issues in a constructive and nonviolent way. Some ways in which parents can do this is by explaining the reasons for the rules, being fair and flexible, controlling anger, helping them to correct their mistakes in a way that helps them to learn.¹⁷

15. Durrant, *Positive Discipline*, 8.

16. Durrant, *Positive Discipline*, 24-25.

17. Durrant, *Positive Discipline*, 31-33.

Understanding How Children Think and Feel and Solve Problems: In order to understand why children behave in a particular way, we need to understand how they think and feel. When we know how they think and feel, we will be able to provide the appropriate kind of warmth and structure. Thus for example, a child who is entering adolescence will seek more independence making it disagree with parents/teachers; the body changes taking place in the child at adolescence may lead it to moodiness thus making an otherwise cheerful child sullen and easily angered. In late adolescence (14 to 18 years) the child's most important task is to find its identity, who he/she is. In order to arrive at a clearer understanding of who he/she is, he/she may try out different things, different types of music, dress, hairstyle, out-of-school activities, friends. At this stage parents/care givers need to strengthen their connection to the child, monitor the child's activities and nurture the child's independence.¹⁸ In order to understand how a child feels and thinks it is important to have some basic understanding of developmental psychology.

Once we know, why children are behaving in a particular way, we will be able to develop appropriate responses that provide warmth and structure and keep in mind the long-terms goals. Thus if a child is spending a lot of time on video games and you have to fight with him/her daily to turn it off and make him/her do the home work, instead of taking the gadget from his/her had and throwing it, you may do the following. "Choose a quiet time to talk with him. Recognize that he enjoys the games. Explain why you are concerned about how much time he spends on them. Invite him to work out some rules with you regarding what games he can play and how much time he can spend playing each day. Reach an agreement that you both think is fair and post it beside the video equipment. Recognize his efforts to stick to the rules."¹⁹

We have articulated the basic steps of Positive Discipline. We shall now see how these steps are present in the way Don Bosco dealt with the young and in the Preventive System that he developed.

Elements of Positive Discipline in Don Bosco and in the Preventive System

We shall look at three programmatic texts from Don Bosco that illustrate how he approached the young: his dream at the age of nine, his work among prisoners, and the narrative of when he met Bartholomew Garelli.

18. Durrant, *Positive Discipline*, 109-120.

19. Durrant, *Positive Discipline*, 274.

The Dream at the Age of Nine

Don Bosco says that his life's work was manifested to him in a dream that he had around the age of nine (1824-25). We shall highlight some parts of the dream. Don Bosco says:

In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a fairly large yard. A crowd of children was playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists.

At that moment a dignified man appeared... He called me by name, told me to take charge of these children, and added these words, "You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start straight away to teach them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue..."

Hardly knowing what I was saying, I asked, "Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?"

"Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge."

"Where by what means can I acquire knowledge?"

"I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her, all wisdom is foolishness."²⁰

Later in the dream a majestic lady, dressed as a queen appeared to Don Bosco. By that time the boys whom Don Bosco had seen in the first part of the dream had disappeared and some dogs, bears and other animals had taken their place. The lady told him: "This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic. And what you see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children."²¹ And then when Don Bosco looked around he saw that the animals had changed and become gentle lambs.

The dream began with showing some boys with ordinary behavioral difficulties. They were fighting among themselves, cursing, and so forth. Don Bosco wanted to correct them and so he jumped into their midst and started hitting them. Then the majestic man who appeared told him, "You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love." Here we have two basic postulates of the Preventive System: (1) avoid corporal punishment; (2) create an atmosphere of love.

20. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 18-19.

21. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 19.

When Don Bosco responded saying that what was asked of him was something impossible he was told: “Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge.” This statement impresses two things on the mind of Don Bosco: (1) relying on human means alone is not enough to transform youngsters. Don Bosco must seek the help of God (You must be *obedient* meant you must be obedient to God and Mother Mary); and (2) Don Bosco must acquire knowledge. He must acquire the necessary competence. An important component of this knowledge or competence would be the ability to reason with youngsters and to be reasonable with them.

From the words of the Lady “Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic,” it was clear that to work with youngsters it was not enough to have academic qualifications, but one must also be a person of gentle disposition and good character.

Don Bosco’s Work Among Prisoners

When Don Bosco was doing his Master’s Degree in Theology, he volunteered to work among the prisoners of Turin especially on weekends. He recorded the thoughts that went through his mind while reflecting on their situation in the following words:

I saw large numbers of young lads aged from twelve to eighteen: fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me. Public disgrace, family dishonor, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates. “Who knows?” I thought to myself, “if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days? Who knows they could be steered away from ruin?” I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord’s grace what the outcome would be. Without God’s grace, all human effort is vain.²²

Having worked with the prisoners for some time Don Bosco noted:

I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens.²³

22. John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 182.

23. *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, 190.

Don Bosco's method with the prisoners worked so well that in 1845 he was able to take a group of them for a whole day outing without any police accompanying them and bring all of the back in the evening without anyone having escaped.²⁴

In his statements about his work with the prisoners we have a statement of the long-term goal of all Don Bosco's work, namely to make the young "good Christians and honest citizens." Don Bosco worked in a predominantly Christian context. So, he spoke in terms of making them good Christians. In a multi-religious context, he would perhaps speak of making the young, God-fearing persons and honest citizens.

Don Bosco's Meeting with Bartholomew Garelli

On December 8, 1841 Don Bosco was preparing to celebrate a religious function. The sacristan, Joseph Comotti, who was rather rude, was looking for someone to assist Don Bosco. At that time a boy wandered into the room and Comotti asked him to assist Don Bosco. When the boy said that he did not know how, Comotti kicked him and chased him out. Hearing the commotion Don Bosco asked what was happening. When he heard what had happened, he told Comotti to call the boy back. Don Bosco reports his dialogue with the boy in the following words:

"Have you attended Mass yet?" I asked him with as much loving kindness as I could.

"No," he answered....

I took my candidate into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him cheerfully:

"My good friend, what's your name?"

"My name's Bartholomew Garelli."

"Where are you from?"

"Asti."

"Is your father alive?"

"No, my father's dead."

"And your mother?"

"My mother's dead too."

24. Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco: A New Biography*. Translated by G. Moja (Mumbai: Tej-Prasarini, 2005), 277-79.

“How old are you?”

“I’m sixteen.”

“Can you read and write?”

“I don’t know anything.”

“Can you sing?”

Wiping his eyes, the boy stared in surprise and answered, ‘No.’

“Can you whistle?”

The boy’s face broke into a smile...

“Are you going to catechism classes now?”

“I don’t dare.”

“Why?”

“Because the other boys are smaller than I am, and they know their catechism. As big as I am, I don’t know anything, so I’m ashamed to go.”

“If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?”

“I’d come very willingly.”

“Would you come willingly to this little room?”

“I’d come willingly enough, provided they don’t beat me.”

“Relax. No one will harm you. On the contrary, you’ll be my friend and you’ll be dealing with me and no one else. When would you like us to begin our catechism?”

“Whenever you wish.”

“This evening?”

“Okay.”

“Are you willing right now?”

“Yes, right now, with great pleasure.”²⁵

25. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 188-90. The questions about singing and whistling are found in the narration of the same incident in Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco*, Vol. II (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1995), 57-59.

After this Don Bosco prayed for the boy and then taught him some prayers and sent him off. He came back with others after a few days and thus began Don Bosco's work with young people.²⁶

In the above narration we have the fundamentals of Don Bosco's method of education. The long-term goal of his system was to help young people to be God-oriented persons and honest citizens. He allayed the fear of the boy and spoke to him "cheerfully" and "with loving kindness." He made the boy feel at ease and at the same time got to know the general background of the boy by asking him some simple questions. He evoked the confidence of the boy in himself by getting him to acknowledge one of his strengths, although a rather insignificant one, namely knowing how to whistle. He reasoned with the boy about his reluctance to attend classes. He showed understanding of the need of the boy for self-respect and not being shamed in front of others. He provided structure by stating that he himself would take the class, that no one would beat the boy and when the class would be held. Don Bosco sought the assistance of God by praying for the boy. He elicited the participation of the boy by allowing him to state why he did not attend class (he was afraid of being fooled by others in the class as they would all be much younger than him) and what his expectations were (he did not want to be beaten). Through his approach Don Bosco was able to solve a behavioral difficulty of the boy, namely his reluctance to attend class.

Don Bosco said that the Preventive System "is based entirely on reason and religion, and above all on kindness; therefore it excludes all violent punishment, and tries to do without even the slightest chastisement."²⁷ For Don Bosco one of the principal ways in which loving kindness would be expressed would be through the physical presence of the educator among the young and through personal accompaniment (remember him speaking about visiting the youngsters in their work places during the week). Another element of the Preventive System is joy or cheerfulness. All the principal elements of the Preventive System are shown in practice in this episode of Bartholomew Garelli.

In this episode of Bartholomew Garelli we find also all the basic principles of Positive Discipline at work, namely, focusing on long-term goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel and problem solving. These principles are based on the best of research on how to deal effectively with the young, and with the young who find themselves

26. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 190.

27. John Bosco, "The Preventive System in the Education of the Young," in *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales* (Editrice S.D.B: Rome., 1984), p. 247.

in difficulties. This episode also shows how Don Bosco respects many of the rights of the child like the right to development, to participation, to be spared from corporal punishment, etc.

Conclusion

So far, those who were using the Preventive System considered it only as a tool to be used in educating children, especially the poor and the marginalized. Our analysis has shown that this system embodies the rights of children, upholds them and promotes them. It is also effective in dealing with children with behavioral difficulties. Hence it can be considered not only as a tool for education but also as a tool for the implementation and promotion of child rights as well as to work effectively with children having behavioral difficulties. It is a system that gives life to the rights of children and wings to the lives of children.

(End Notes)

- i. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Vol III (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 68 (*Henceforth referred to as BM*)
- ii. A Letter written by Don Bosco to a Jew in 1881. Letter 2247. *Epistolario V*, p. 97.
- iii. John Bosco, "The Preventive System in the Education of the Young," in *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales (Editrice S.D.B: Rome, 1984)*, p. 251.
- iv. John Bosco, "The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses," (1883) This translation is taken from Michael Ribotta, "If Punish You Must..." <https://sites.google.com/site/dbway2010/resources> accessed 23-02-2014. This translation is slightly different from the text given in Eugenio Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Vol XVI (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1995), p. 368-69. But this translation reflects better *the spirit of Don Bosco's words as found in Memorie Biografiche, Vol. XVI, p. 439: "Anzitutto se vogliamo farci vedere amici del vero bene dei nostri allievi, ed obbligarli a fare il loro dovere, bisogna che voi non dimentichiate mai che rappresentate i genitori di questa cara gioventù..."*
- v. John Bosco, "The Preventive System Applied to Young People at Risk," (1878). <http://www.bosconet.aust.com/risk.htm>, accessed 23-02-2014.

- vi. Memorie dell'Oratorio, 199-201 cited in Pietro Braido, *Pedagogical Experience* (LAS: Rome,, 1989), 76.
- vii. BM, XVI, p. 376.
- viii. John Bosco, "Letter from Rome," (1884) in *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales (Editrice S.D.B.: Rome, 1984)*, p. 257.
- ix. John Bosco, "From the Spiritual Testament of Saint John Bosco," in *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales (Editrice S.D.B.: Rome, 1984)*, p. 269.
- x. John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales: From 1815 to 1855 (Don Bosco Publications: New Rochelle, 1989)*, p. 281 [*Henceforth referred to as Memoirs of the Oratory*].
- xi. Letter of 26 August 1872 to the Mayor of Turin. *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco II*, 224-25.
- xii. John Bosco, "The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses," (1883) This translation is taken from Michael Ribotta, "If Punish You Must..." ..." <https://sites.google.com/site/dbway2010/resources>, accessed 23-02-2014.
- xiii. "The Preventive System in the Education of the Young," p. 249.
- xiv. "The Preventive System in the Education of the Young," p. 252.
- xv. BM, XVI, p. 368.
- xvi. BM, IV, 205-06. Ribotta, "Training Boys to Earn a Living: The Beginnings of Vocational Education at the Oratory," in *Journal of Salesian Studies IV/1 (Spring 1993)*, " p. 73-76. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 366-67. *Teresio Bosco, In His Footsteps, trans. Joseph Puthenkalam (Don Bosco Publication: Madras, n.d.)*, p. 80-81; *Silvio Tramontin, "Don Bosco and the World of Work," in Patrick Egan and Mario Midali, eds., Don Bosco's Place in History: Acts of the First International Congress on Don Bosco Studies (LAS: Roma, 1993)*, p. 253.
- xvii. "Letter from Rome," p. 260.
- xviii. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, p. 190.
- xix. John Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, in *Opere Edite X*, p. 24-25
- xx. "The Preventive System in the Education of the Young," p. 247.