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# Giovanni Bosco and Young People in the Master-apprentice Relationship Perspective

Upbringing Implications in View of Work with  
Socially maladjusted Youth<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

It is hard 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>2</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>3</sup>

The author of this article wants to explore the phenomenology of Giovanni Bosco's encounter with his pupils. We would like to explain two explorative issues, that is, a) what are the characteristic features of Giovanni Bosco's relations with his students and what are the resulting implications;

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1. Editor's Note: This short paper was presented by Fr. Bogdan Stańkowski, SDB at the International Convention of Salesian Pedagogy held at the Salesianum and the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, in 2015. The paper was later published in *Con Don Bosco: educatori dei giovani del nostro tempo*, ed. Vito Orlando, Rome: LAS, 2015. It is being reproduced here by kind permission of the Director of LAS and of the editor, Fr. Vito Orlando.

2. See Katarzyna Olbrycht, *Współczesne pytania wokół relacji "mistrz-uczeń"*, <http://gazeta.us.edu.pl/node/194851> (access: 20.09.2014).

3. See Roma Kwiecińska, Mirosław J. Szymański (ed.), *Młodzież a dorośli. Napięcia między socjalizacją a wychowaniem* (Kraków: Akademia Pedagogiczna, Instytut Nauk o Wychowaniu, 2001).

and b) how socially maladjusted youth perceive their educator and how such teacher-student relations fit into the category of the master-apprentice dialogue?

Both contemporary scholars of the Bosco's Preventive System and documents of the Salesian Society<sup>4</sup> encourage a new perception of the system, particularly in view of working with socially maladjusted youth.<sup>5</sup>

The elaborations in the first part of this contribution, are theoretical and have been conducted on the basis of the available literature on the subject-matter. In the second part, we will present the results of our studies, conducted among socially maladjusted boys in the Salesian Youth Education Centre in Trzciniec (Poland).

### **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, that is, encounters that served only to meet the boys or learn about their family or material situations. 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 simple interpersonal relation onto a higher level. They revealed a new meaning of existence; they helped pupils realize who they are and what task and duties they face in life.

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

The analysis of the literature on the prevention system allows us to claim that Giovanni Bosco encountered his pupils during their specific life situations (irregular/casual jobs, living on streets, searching for a place to sleep, and so forth). Bosco had been devoting his time for such boys since his youth. As a young priest, he met young people in their environment,

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4. Dicastero per la Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana, *La Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana. Quadro di riferimento* (Roma: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2014), 83-85.

5. See Mara Borsi, "Sistema preventivo e resilienza: un possibile e fecondo dialogo," in *Salesianum* 2(2011) Aprilis-Junius, 309-332; Francesco Casella, *L'esperienza educativa in preventiva di don Bosco. Studi sull'educazione salesiana fra tradizione e modernità* (Roma: LAS, 2007).

organizing first oratorios and workshops<sup>6</sup> The consequence of meeting boys in their life situations was a continuous accompaniment in their life, directed towards a complete, optimal and integral development in social, spiritual and intellectual dimensions.<sup>7</sup> This accompaniment revolved around the concept of implementing a full and protagonism-oriented subjectivity of pupils.

***Encounters characterised by a readiness to “experience” another person***

Giovanni Bosco's encounters with young people fit perfectly into the principle of dialogue, promoted by M. Buber. He stated that a human being becomes “I” only after encountering “You.”<sup>8</sup> Those encounters were characterized by a family atmosphere, affirmation of a person, 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>9</sup> 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 the search for the truth about a student, 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>10</sup>

***A dialogue between a master and an apprentice in terms of “becoming” a more mature human being***

Contemporary scholars emphasize 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>11</sup> Referring

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6. Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, ed. Eugenio Ceria (Torino: SEI,1946), 8.

7. Pietro Braido, *Il Sistema Preventivo di Don Bosco* (Zürich: PAS-Verlag, 1964).

8. See Martin Buber, *Das Problem des Menschen*, trans. Robert Reszke, *Problem człowieka* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia-Spacja, 1993), 29.

9. 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).

10. See Pietro Braido, *Filosofia dell'educazione* (Zürich: PAS-Verlag, 1967), 190.

11. See Kataryzna Olbrycht, *O roli przykładu, wzoru, autorytetu i mistrza w wychowaniu osobowym* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek Wydawnictwo, 2007).

to a dialogue between a master and an apprentice, Josef 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>12</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>13</sup> The educational dialogue with pupils, initiated by Giovanni Bosco, always had the features of personal development, self-creativity and experiencing own subjectivity.<sup>14</sup>

### ***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 people acquire during their lifetime. No person is born with a pre-established reference to the world of values because they are transferred using an example, upbringing.<sup>15</sup> In the opinion of the scholars, a tutor must be a witness of values<sup>16</sup> and a transferor of truth, because the aspiration to the truth is the highest good in upbringing.<sup>17</sup> According to Tadeusz 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>18</sup> Those observations may serve as a specific criterion for an understanding of the master-apprentice relationship in the axiological dimension concerning Don 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

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12. Josef Tischner, *Mistrz I uczeń*, <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wwwylacznie/mistrz-i-uczen/bxt4x> (access: 22.09.2014).

13. Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, 96.

14. See Luciano Cian, “*Il Sistema Preventivo*” di don Bosco e i lineamenti caratteristici del suo stile (Leumann (Torino): LDC, 1985), 199.

15. See Małgorzata Malicka, *Dać ludziom pragnienie, w: Edukacja aksjologiczna*, vol. IV, ed. Katarzyn Olbrycht (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1999), 35.

16. Tadeusz Gadacz, “Wychowanie jako spotkanie osób”, in *Człowiek – wychowanie – kultura. Wybór tekstów*, ed. Franciszek Adamski (Kraków: WAM, 1993), 113.

17. W. Wołoszyn, “Deontologia a kształtowanie pedagogicznej relacji rodzina-szkoła”, in *Pedagogiczna relacja rodzina-szkoła. Dylematy czasu przemian*, ed. Andrzej W. Janke (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSP, 1995), 115.

18. Gadacz, *Wychowanie*, 67.

of young people and their education to values as well as prioritizing a pupil as a human being.<sup>19</sup> In the recalled system, Don Bosco strongly emphasized the transfer of positive values, the forming of a system of values based on Christian religion and philosophy. In Bosco's relations with young people, it is possible to notice the concern to familiarize young people with transcendent values and encourage them to take an approach of openness and acceptance of such values.<sup>20</sup> As an educator, Don Bosco favored the formation of the attitude of conscience in pupils as well as a personal responsibility for the shape of one's life.<sup>21</sup> The person of Giovanni Bosco as a master appears as an intriguing, delighting person, provoking to undertake an effort to adhere to values which guarantee the self-realization of humanity in young people. Being a master figure for his pupils meant that Don Bosco refused to take a central point of attention of his pupils. Constant references to truth, freedom, and choosing that which is good and love, somehow make boys seed their lives in Christian values.<sup>22</sup>

***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. Such an adult person, having a certain moral prestige and living by ethical principles, is involved in the upbringing of a young generation. Being a guide and master, the adult helps the young person to accept norms which become essential in building young person's personality as a protagonist.<sup>23</sup> Authority is bound to a personal structure of a human being, and thus, as noted by Władysław Stróżewski, "you cannot have authority, you must be one."<sup>24</sup> In the literature, authority is presented in moral, epistemic<sup>25</sup> and liberating dimensions, encouraging autonomy in

19. See *La Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana. Quadro di riferimento*, 82-89.

20. Pietro Ricaldone, *Oratorio festivo. Catechismo, Formazione Religiosa* (Torino: SEI, 1940), 25.

21. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne et al, *Memorie Biografiche di Don (del Beato- di San) Giovanni Bosco* (Torino: S. Benigno Canavese, 1898-1948), vol. 6, 390.

22. See Lemoyne, *Memorie Biografiche*, vol. 3, 605.

23. Pietro Braidò, *Autorità educativa*, <http://dizionariofse.unisal.it/index.php?method=section&action=zoom&id=133> (access: 24.09.2014).

24. Władysław Stróżewski, "Mała fenomenologia autorytetu", in *Ethos* 1997, no 1, 35.

25. Mieczysław Łobocki, "Autorytet nauczyciela jako warunek pedagogicznej relacji rodzina-szkola", in *Pedagogiczna relacja rodzina-szkola. Dylematy czasu przemian*,

pupils.<sup>26</sup> In this view, Bosco's prevention system is a method which presents an attractive perspective for students and their development in growing and fulfilling their "Self." The efficiency of this measure depends on the tutor's authority and upon the quality of his presence among pupils.<sup>27</sup> The latter being founded upon tutor's moral power. Hence, it is about the authority which has substantiation and which becomes an attractive and tempting standard for pupils regarding 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>28</sup> To be an authority and, what follows, to ensure adequate upbringing conditions for pupils means to be an inspiration and encouragement for students' internal development. It proposes to be an external assurance of achieving things which would not be accessible if students were to be left on their own.<sup>29</sup>

### Some clarifications on methodology of author's own studies

The scope of own studies was how pupils in the Salesian Youth Education Centre in Trzciniec perceive their tutors. The study was conducted using the dialogue method, between March and June 2014. The dialogue was unstructured and direct, and the selected technique was a personal conversation, based on active listening. Out of 80 pupils, 20 have been chosen, in the 14-18 age bracket. The pupil selection criteria were as follows: a) the longest time of living in the center; and 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. Also, boys were encouraged to determine the extent, to which their relations with tutors may be perceived as a master-apprentice relationship.

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ed. Andrzej W. Janke (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSP, 1995), 139.

26. J. Schepens, "Autorytet wychowawców", in *Communio* 1992, no 3, 39.

27. Giovanni Bosco, "La lettera alla comunita' salesiana dell'Oratorio di Torino-Valdocco. Roma, 10 maggio 1884", in *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, ed. P. Braidò, (Roma: LAS, 1992).

28. See Pietro Ricaldone, *Don Bosco Educatore* (Asti: Colle Don Bosco, 1951), vol. 1, 290;310.

29. Braidò, *Filosofia dell'educazione*, 181-185. See also Ricaldone, *Don Bosco Educatore*, 63-72.

**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 strong feelings and parental love, poor life examples, encouraging to commit minor thefts, abandoning children and going abroad, alcoholism, and so forth). 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 center, pupils display general aversion towards tutors-teachers, which originates from schools or other upbringing centers. The majority of students feel no remorse about the deeds committed in the past. In such circumstances, pupils appreciate the attitude of tutors, who do not stigmatize young and socially maladjusted boys, but they rather try to empathically emerge in pupils' world, their problems, values motives, thereby becoming someone trustworthy and dependable.

c) the first phase of a contact between students and tutors teachers is characterized 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 a 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 argue that adults in the center create conditions for a true upbringing, based on 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 emphasize an enormous importance of tutor's presence in



the institution. The assistance of tutors, as well as a regular contact with the adult person, changes pupil's negative image of adults. The previous situation at 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 have gradually familiarized themselves with a presence of a positive character in their lives. They gain the conviction that cooperation with an adult person is beneficial for creating own future and re-entering social life.

g) interviews with the boys have proven that tutors try to emphasize pupils' subjectivity, prioritize young people and encourage them to assume the position of a protagonist about 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 a supervising police officer and are inaccessible seem to be marginal. These claims are typical of the boys with the shortest residence period in the center or those who had experienced some rehabilitation trauma in another facility.

h) boys admit that the contact with a tutor is positive also in the area of values. Adults, using conversation, school classes, trips, camps, or physical work, guide pupils towards the values previously unknown to them. These values include good 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, and 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 the adequate reference point, a kind of authority. However, some admit that in many instances, tutors replace their parents, becoming a sort of a guide concerned about the best possible development of a pupil and stimulating undiscovered goodness in students.

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 favorable for the boys who undergo re-socialization and who above all else may build their new, own identity.

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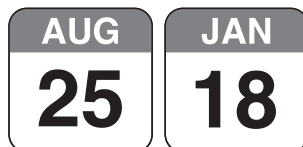
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