

The theory of presence of Andries Baart as a source of inspiration for education and assistance Don Bosco as discussion partner / companion

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Preface

A great advocate of the theory of presence is Andries Baart, professor at the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht. In the nineties, he did very detailed research among pastoral workers in poverty areas of a big city¹. He was interested in the question how the loving and attentive closeness of pastors 'without a desk, a room or a consultation hour', functions with people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods². His research begins with the choice of pastors to be people with a heart for caring. He elaborates the practical aspects of caring under the name of presence. He considers presence as a specific and essential characteristic of caring. Caring proximity is both a condition for and a characteristic of presence.

Although the presence theory was developed for pastoral workers, this approach is inspiring for everyone who works with people (from the community police officer, nurse and social worker to the educator and teacher)³. 'There is no contact or people-oriented profession conceivable that does not have at least some of the presence approach, and there are hardly any goals conceivable in contact-oriented professions that are not in any way related to the values of the presence approach.'⁴ Professionals recognize the (original) love for their profession in the outlined approach.

In this article, we want to investigate what the presence theory can mean for education and assistance. Don Bosco is our discussion partner and companion.

(1) BAART, A., *Een theorie van presentie*, 3^{de} druk, Den Haag, Lemma, 2006.

(2) BAART, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

(3) Andries Baart also keeps the presence approach open for other people-oriented professions. *Ibidem*, p. 49; 774; p. 808. However, this does not prevent him from displaying a certain reserve in other places (p. 808-816) regarding the applicability of presence in other areas. Since his research, he and others have supplemented and expanded this theory. The supplement concerns research into whether the presence approach can also be applied in the context of social services, community work and (mental) health care. The development concerns the further development of elements from the basic theory that had not been thoroughly elaborated, or that need to be adapted to the new domains.

(4) *Ibidem*, p. 810.

1. The core of the presence approach

The essence of the presence approach is 'being there for the other', without having a direct problem-solving orientation or target. In the presence approach objectives are not seen as something that is fixed in advance and which is defined in a strict manner, but relates to the development of the other person. Solving possible problems is not excluded, but does not come first. The main contribution of the presence practitioner is the loyal offer of himself: 'come and listen, chat without obligation or discuss seriously, drink a cup of coffee or have dinner with us, do a simple job, go shopping with me ...'¹

Elsewhere Andries Baart describes, in dialogue with Annelies van Heijst, presence as: '... a practice in which the caretaker engages attentively and devotedly to the other, so he learns to see what is at stake for the other - from desire to fear. So he will understand what can be done in a particular situation either what he can mean for the other person. What can be done is done.'²

In this context, it emerges that it mostly concerns people who are socially superfluous.³

For his research, Andries Baart has closely followed pastoral workers who are active in old city districts and live there in the midst of extreme poverty. In this way he discovered that their actions are characterized by five aspects⁴

- (1) The pastoral worker himself goes to the people instead of the other way around. Usually he cannot be found at a desk but with the people. He is easy to address. The rhythm of work is geared by the life rhythm of others. Although the pastoral workers whom Baart studied generally had long-term contacts, the basic principle of connecting with the people you work for counts for all contacts, regardless of their duration.
- (2) The pastoral worker is not limited to one type of problem or request for help. He is versatile, also cross-domain, in short: does what needs to be done. Those involved do not have to earn the attention and cordiality of the pastoral worker, they are neither bound by (formal) conditions. The engagement of the pastoral worker is unconditional. He can focus on an individual, but also on families, streets and neighbourhoods. He works as much as possible with issues, stories and social structures in the way they occur.

(1) *Ibidem*, p. 732-733.

(2) In a conversation with Annelies van Heijst, Andries Baart expresses the characteristic of the presence approach as: 'be there for the other, everything starts with a good and close relationship, (...) it is about care, about the dignity of the other, about the basal act of acknowledging that the other - how crazy, how different - counts, about reciprocity (from cordiality to struggle), about everyday forms of work, about stories, about conscientious attunement to everyday life, about the will to dig for the best in the other, to make one live up to the best of his or her potential and about never to let anyone down.' BAART, A., VAN HEIJST, Annelies, *Inleiding: een beknopte schets van de Presentietheorie*, in *Sociale Interventie* 12(2003) 2, p. 5-8.

(3) BAART, A., VAN HEIJST, Annelies, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

(4) BAART, A., VAN HEIJST, Annelies, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7-8. The mentioned characteristics can be transformed to competences and learning processes. That means they can be acquired. See: WILKEN, J.P., (Red.) *De presentiebenadering in het onderwijs. Handreikingen voor introductie en innovatie*, Utrecht, 2006.

- (3) The pastoral worker connects with the life and lifecycle of the people involved. He shares their lives. From here understanding arises and problems and desires are understood. He uses everyday forms of interaction and teaching, ordinary language, spontaneous occasions and starting points. It is not about tough or difficult conversations, but rather about working together and addressing serious issues and coming up with possible solutions. The contact between pastoral worker and his client is often cordial and informal. Fidelity is not an empty word.
- (4) Attunement and openness form the fourth characteristic. In the presence approach goals are not fixed in advance. This open approach also means starting from a position of not knowing, letting yourself be surprised, suspending your judgment and actions, admitting the meaning of life to come through to you. The pastoral worker does not have his own agenda, but adapts to the needs of the other person. He puts the good of the other first. This means that the work is not controlled by predetermined frameworks, such as diagnostic classifications.
- (5) The fifth methodical characteristic relates to meaning/sense-making. The pastoral worker always keeps in mind that the life of the other person is meaningful. He converts this conviction in presence and availability. Furthermore, the meaning of pastoral action is not always clear in advance, but unfolds in the progressive process, the search for solution directions and eventually specific interventions.

Andries Baart summarizes 'presence' as follows: 'The qualified closeness and involvement to another person - even if a thousand other things are still to happen - does well in a most basic way: you are seen, you receive confirmation, you matter, you socialize, you are useful, you can do more, you can ignore yourself or just face it, you are touched and protected.'¹

Presence, however, is not 'just being there', in the sense of a physical presence. Presence implies intense involvement with the other. This intense involvement becomes more concrete when we look at the eight principles the presence practitioner prescribes for himself to do the job properly:²

1. freeing up: freeing from routine, from professional habits, from organization and agenda, as a result of which availability for the other may arise.
2. being open to the other, where the story and the life of the other person may even touch you. It is about being receptive to that other person.
3. involve: enter into the relationship with the other person.
4. join: join the world of the other and respect it as it is, which will confirm the other person in his identity.
5. move into the other (change of perspective): start from the inner perspective of the other to understand what it is about.
6. lend yourself as a reliable companion.
7. control yourself: be patient, take the time.
8. dedicate yourself: the concept of loyalty through thick and thin.

(1) BAART, A., *Een theorie van presentie*, p. 795

(2) BAART, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 753-763. Compare: DE MUYNCK, A., *Christelijk leraarschap tussen presentie, vorming en werkelijkheid*, Gauda, Christelijke hogeschool de Driestar, 2004, p. 9.

These principles and the underlying values make it clear that presence is not a passive attitude but presupposes an active commitment. The profession of presence is a methodically strict, competence and virtue-requiring affair¹. From the many practical stories that Baart adds to his study, the picture emerges that presence is a very intrusive form of action. It is not so much visible in the big gesture or the precisely planned and proportionately correct action but in the sometimes almost imperceptible glance or small hint.

2. Presence and upbringing

Translated to the educational context, we can summarize presence as 'The offering of the educator in the service of the development process of the youngster.'²

The five characteristics of presence Andries Baart distinguishes, apply to a greater or lesser extent also to educators, besides some adjustment to the first and fourth characteristic³. Be it with the necessary variations depending of the different work situations in which they are active⁴. These characteristics can also be found in the pedagogical approach of Don Bosco.

(1) First of all, it is characteristic that the educator follows the youngster (instead of the reverse). He is usually physically present in the learning and living situations of the young people and spends part of the day with them, following the rhythm of effort and recreation. We cannot, of course, ignore the reality that things are different in a number of situations: the educator does not just follow the youngster; the youngster also follows the educator. The advice that Don Bosco gives to one of his young collaborators, who asks him how to approach the boys, still appeals to the imagination and agrees with this characteristic: 'Go to the pump.'⁵ At the pump in Valdocco the boys usually came together. Don Bosco expected his educators to be where the boys were. Today we know how to seek contact with them in an interested and playful manner, in order for trust to grow. That trust forms the basis of every educational practice or upbringing. This practice teaches that it is best to follow first to be allowed to guide later.

(2) Every phase in a person's life has specific development tasks. Educators try to provide answers to the needs and development tasks of children and young people. An

(1) Ibidem, p. 758. Baart elaborates this by means of a comprehensive description of normative professionalism. Ibidem, p. 827-843. See also: WILKEN, J.P., *Over professionaliteit en presentie. Pleidooi voor normatieve professionaliteit bij HBO-opleidingen*, in WILKEN, J.P., (Red.) *De presentiebenadering in het onderwijs. Handreikingen voor introductie en innovatie*, Utrecht, 2006, p. 6-12.

(2) DE MUYNCK, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

(3) *Ibidem*, p. 28-29.

(4) *Ibidem*, p. 7-8.

(5) VESPIGNANI, G., *Un anno alla scuola del beato Don Bosco (1876-1877)*, San Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica Don Bosco, 1930, p. 64-69.

educator does not limit himself to a partial aspect, but addresses the youngster in his totality. No domain of life is excluded. In that sense, upbringing is always integral education. This means that an educator has a broad working field. He is unconditionally available for everything that occurs. He does not focus on the young person as an individual, but on the (entire) context to which he belongs (family, street, neighbourhood ...). This includes working as much as possible with the problems, the stories and the social structures as they occur. This desire to let young people develop, made Don Bosco intuitively opt for an integral education. In Valdocco he offered them the opportunity to relax, to follow vocational training, to study and develop intellectually, to deepen their religious belief ...

Young people who came to the Oratory experienced that they were accepted unconditionally. Don Bosco gave them time to find their place in the group to create mutual trust. He met their concrete needs.

(3) An educator closely matches the world and lifecycle of the youngster. He shares their lives. There from he learns about the young people to understand their problems and desires. He connects to their life and makes use of what occurs spontaneously. The interaction between educator and young person is often cordial and informal. Loyalism is neither an empty word here.

During his traineeship in the Convict, Don Bosco came in contact with young people who were in prison or lived on the streets. He discovered that it does not automatically go well with young people. It can go rather wrong. At the same time, his conviction grew that young people can develop into honest citizens and good Christians, if someone is good for them, supports and encourages them¹. Again and again Don Bosco tried to connect to the young people he met through ordinary things: tried to be interested in what they were interested in, tried to play together, to eat, to do the dishes ... In 1884 he wrote from Rome to the educational community of Valdocco: 'The teacher who is only seen behind his lectern is a teacher and thus no more. But when he spends recreation time with the boys, he will become like a brother. When someone sees a priest preaching from the pulpit, one will say that the man does no more neither less than his duty. But if he speaks words during recreation time, that will be the words of someone who loves.'²

(4) The educator is constantly tuning into the ever-changing questions and desires of young people. He is able to pick up whether or not they have specific needs. He does not have his own agenda, but adapts to the needs of the other person. Goals are not fixed in advance. He must always be able to adjust as he puts the good of the other first. An open approach also means starting from a position of not knowing, letting yourself be surprised, suspending your judgment and actions.

(1) BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di A. Giraud, Roma, LAS, 2011, 240 p. BOSCO, J., *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, Translation by Daniel Lyons, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelvechi and Michael Mendl, SDB, New Rochelle, Don Bosco Publications, 1989, p. 42-44.

(2) BOSCO, G., Due lettere datata da Roma 10 maggio 1884, in BRAIDO, P., (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, (Istituto Storico Salesiano - Roma. Fonti - Serie Privata, 9), terza edizione accresciuta, Roma, LAS, 2005, p. 384.

Even if in educational work objectives are used that do not come from the youngsters, the alignment with young people remains an important basic attitude. The biographies of Domenico Savio, Michele Magone and Francesco Besucco¹ illustrate how Don Bosco had this attitude. This becomes apparent both from the description of the first meeting between Don Bosco and each of these young people and from the way he accompanies them in the crisis they experience in the Oratory.²

During first contact, Don Bosco places himself at the level of the conversation partner and a serene and friendly conversation begins, which means that all distrust is lost. He makes it easy for the boy to speak freely about himself. In this way he obtains the necessary information about his history, his current situation and his desires.

The core of the three biographies consists of the description of a crisis that affects the three main characters in a different way. Domenico Savio experiences a spiritual crisis.³ Michele Magone struggles with his mediocrity.⁴ While Francesco Besucco is overcome by homesickness and feels displaced in the Oratory.⁵

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- (1) *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales, per cura del sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp., 1859, 142 p. (Followed by 5 editions by Don Bosco: ²1860; ³1861; ⁴1866; ⁵1878; ⁶1880); *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per cura del sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp., 1861, 96 p. (Second edition by Don Bosco in 1866); *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera pel sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales, 1864, 192 p. (Second edition by Don Bosco in 1878).
 - (2) GIRAUDO, A., *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in BOSCO, G., *Vite di Giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*, saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Giraudò, Roma, LAS, 2012, p. 5-35.
 - (3) For Domenico Savio, the crisis comes six months after his arrival in Valdocco. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception he presented himself to the Holy Mary. His behavior was afterwards so edifying and virtuous that even Don Bosco was amazed. The disposition in which he was then, was one of unconditional availability for the inner working of grace and the recommendations of his educators. In that condition an incitement to holiness was enough to awaken in him an irresistible desire for perfection. His crisis was a 'mystical' crisis. The intervention of his spiritual leader was necessary in order to orient that desire to the perfect practice of virtue in daily life. In this way Don Bosco could keep him from folding back on his own intimacy and of escape from reality through forms of asceticism that did not fit with his age. GIRAUDO, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.
 - (4) After a month in the Oratory due to the influence of the moral qualities of the upbringing climate in Valdocco, Michele Magone starts to discover his own mediocrity. His crisis is an 'ethical' crisis, characterized by guilt and fear. After a reassuring conversation with Don Bosco, who points at possible way outs, Magone succeeds in overcoming the crisis on his own. It is a process of conversion that leads him to a state of spiritual serenity that he has never witnessed before and gives access to a new value system that he voluntarily adopts with great dedication. GIRAUDO, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.
 - (5) A few days after his arrival in Turin, Francesco Besucco is overcome by homesickness. He feels totally displaced in an area that is completely different from the world he comes from. His crisis is a 'cultural' and 'affective' crisis, accompanied by feelings of loss and not being able to fit in with the other young people in the Oratory. Don Bosco comforts him in a friendly conversation. He encourages him and orients him to a simplified life program. 'Only practice three things and everything will go well [...]: joy, study, godliness.' In this way he finds a way to deal constructively with the cultural difference and finds back serenity. GIRAUDO, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

The story of the victory over the crisis in a conversation between Don Bosco and the student reveals at least four qualities of an educator: patience to come to the core of the question; the ability to be close to the youngster through difficult moments; inner freedom and an inner balance whereby the pitfall to take over from the youngster is avoided so that he can grow in freedom.¹

By attuning in this way Don Bosco gained the necessary trust that allowed him to speak the right word or give the right push at the right time to help the youngster to overcome the obstacle with his own strength.

(5) A presence practitioner always keeps in mind that the life of the other person is meaningful, that the other person counts for at least one person. You could say that the perspective for the educator is that his commitment to the youngster makes sense. This meaning consists primarily of presence and availability, indicating you are there for the other person.

Giuseppe Brosio, one of the first collaborators of the Oratory, gives a nice illustration of what this means in practice when he tells how Don Bosco receives the boys in his office: 'He received them with the same respect he showed to distinguished visitors. He asked them to take a seat and listened very carefully as if everything that was told was of great importance. When the conversation ended, he walked to the door with them and opened it to let them out speaking the words: 'We will always be friends, will we not?''² Don Bosco possessed the unique quality to make every young person feel that he was personally concerned about him which went straight to heart.

Being there for young people in their context is in line with how outsiders experience educators and how educators perceive themselves. It also matches their desire. Educators want to be with the youngsters, make themselves available for their development, provide something to young people when they ask for it and respond to special needs when needed.

An essential ingredient of aid that works is close proximity, in which the helper - professional or not - closely attunes to those who seek support.

From the youngster's perspective, presence is the first thing that matters. Presence, being there for young people, is the first and fundamentally active force, which makes education work.

Education, as much as presence, is not merely 'just being there', in the sense of physical presence. Annelies Van Heijst describes presence as professional humanity, which meets the 'need' of the other person, his desire for real attention. Presence takes shape in the first place as a way of being and only in the second place as a way of doing. The presence

(1) VOJTÁŠ, M., *L'arte salesiana dell'incontro, dell'accompagnamento e del discernimento*, <http://www.sdb.org/it/famiglia-salesiana/165-giornate-spiritualita-della-fs/1407-gfs-giornate-fs-18-21-gennaio-2018>.

(2) BROSIO, G., *Memoria*, in Fondo Don Bosco Microschede 554 E10-555 D8, mentioned in LENTI, A., *Don Bosco. History and Spirit*, LAS, Roma 2008, vol. III, p.148.

practitioner is above all a person that matters for the other person, but also makes the other person matter to him. This is a process of increasing reciprocity.¹

The actions of the presence practitioner are strongly embedded in a relationship that is built up with the other. Here is a clear parallel with the educational relationship.² Both imply an intense involvement with the other/youngster.

A striking difference between presence in the context in which Baart applies it and presence in an educational context is the relational level. The educator is not an informal and equal partner of the child. An asymmetry is enclosed in the nature of the position of the educator. In addition to equality as a fellow human being, there is always the other position of guide or leader, as the person who points beyond the moment.³

3. Presence versus intervention in education and assistance

The presence concept is not so much opposed to absence, as to being the opposite of intervention.⁴ Intervention is a common term in the world of assistance to indicate that interventions take place when a problem occurs. Interventions arise from rational-diagnostic thinking, in which the following steps can be distinguished: problem - diagnosis - intervention. When a problem arises, this can be solved by clearly analyzing and diagnosing from a distance, after which the problematic situation is tackled with an appropriate intervention.⁵

In the presence concept, on the other hand, presence is linked to the problem that occurs in the experience of a person. The presence practitioner does not act from a distance by objectifying and 'taking into account' the problem, but he is close to the reality of the moment. Because of this proximity he makes the person or the 'system' stronger and tries to connect with the possibilities that are there at the moment, even if they seem minimal at first sight.

The presentation approach is not a preliminary stage of an intervention approach. So it is not a matter of: first presence than intervention. Presence and intervention should not be

(1) VAN HEIJST, Annelies, *Menslievende zorg. Een ethische kijk op professionaliteit*, Kampen, Uitgeverij Klement, 2005.

(2) Zie: LOOTS, C., SCHAUMONT, Colette, (Red.), *Voordoelen in dialoog. Aandacht voor een kwaliteitsvolle pedagogische relatie*, Brussel, Don Bosco Centrale, 2011.

(3) Vergelijk LOOTS, C., SCHAUMONT, Colette, (Red.), *Opvoeden met Don Bosco als gids en tochtgenoot*, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, Don Bosco Centrale, 2014, p. 14-15. Compare: DE MUYNCK, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 9-10.

(4) See: *Ibidem*, p. 10-12

(5) The interventionist approach is based on the paradigm of control. This ideal can be referred to as the guiding motive of natural sciences since the Age of Enlightenment. Because of the knowledge about reality, we increasingly know which cause-effect relationships there are. When a problem occurs, you have to study it. If you find the cause, you'll find a solution. Such is the way of reasoning.

understood as opposites but especially as complementary, in the sense of coexisting and influencing each other. Having said that, Baart argues extensively that presence is something completely different from intervention. This approach is clearly distinguishable from the intervention approach in terms of goals and methodology.¹

Andries Baart mentions five points that clarify the distinction with an intervention approach and from which the power of presence can be deduced as a counterbalance.²

(1) To feel: In an intervention approach things are objectified and diagnosed. In the presence approach one acts on the basis of what one feels that is needed. This feeling is more helpful than an intervention. The educator's well-balanced intuition contributes more to the development of the youngster than technically correct planning.

(2) Integral approach: The intervention approach reduces and leaves away parts that do matter in one way or another. If, for example, a behavioral problem is signaled, this should not be treated as a separate problem. The question that is asked first and foremost in a presence approach is what the problem means for the child or the young person. From there, solutions can be sought.

(3) Responsibility: Finding orientations (where should it go from here now) requires less expert intervention than a form of quiet consultation in which the life projects of the parties involved are themselves decisive. The orientation is found better when youngsters are allowed to put their existential questions on the table.

(4) Positive focus: Although experts are not paid to invest in the unsolvable (contingent questions) nor in the trouble-free problems (joy and pleasure), these are of great importance in the articulation of the orientation mentioned under three. The one-sided concentration on problem-solving is not unproblematic.

(5) Relationship: Relationships in people-oriented professions are asymmetrical and therefore incessantly run the risk of silent violence: argumentative force majeure, sanctioning power ... Apart from objections of ethical nature, this also has the effect that the competence of the youngster is more or less reduced to zero. The educator runs the risk that the subtle exercise of power suppresses the possibilities of the youngster. The presence approach emphasizes the equality of educator and young person. In this context, one should therefore think more of the equivalence principle. However, one is afraid of the danger that the authority relationship is affected.³

Education is full of interventionist thinking. Problems are detected, analysed and subsequently challenged with adapted interventions. This does not only happen at the macro level when educational innovations or innovations in care are implemented, but also at the individual level. Not in the least in the field of orthopedagogics, where carefully designed interventions have proven their success.⁴

(1) *Ibidem*, p. 812. Also: VAN HEIJST, Annelies, *Waar de presentietheorie allemaal goed voor is*, in *Sociale Interventie* 12(2003) nr. 2, p. 9-17.

(2) *Ibidem*, p. 774-775. Zie: DE MUYNCK, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 30 noot 40.

(3) LOOTS, C., SCHAUMONT, Colette, (Red.), *Opvoeden met Don Bosco als gids en tochtgenoot*, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, Don Bosco Centrale, 2014, p. 14-15.

(4) BAART, A., *Een theorie van presentie*, p. 731.

Baart is unquestionably right in claiming that a presence approach is based on a different paradigm than the intervention approach. Nevertheless, both approaches are no alternatives for each other, but aspects of the same offer. They can (and in many cases must) merge into one another. The problem is that the intervention approach now dominates everywhere and presence elements are referred to the background. Baart has great objections to this because crucial values and opportunities to help others are thus removed.¹

Baart's studies show that an important problem in contemporary assistance is that people living in the margins, people who feel socially superfluous, are no longer reached. It is now about large numbers. The connection with them has been lost for a number of reasons. An important factor is that care providers are bound by normative institutional standards and procedures, which must be measurable and prevent them from actively seeking the connection.² Due to the bureaucratization of services, the professional has become a bureaucrat. This causes damage rather than service. Frequently heard complaints from the angle of educators, teachers and care providers against the ever stronger protocolisation of methods and evaluation systems (pupil tracking systems, client file, competence profiles ...) and last but not least performance pressure can be traced back to the policy measures imposed from above.

A few examples of the consequences. Burn-out is significantly more common in education, teaching and care-taking than in other areas. Managers spend more time writing plans and do other administrative work so that they do not get in touch with colleagues and young people every day. Many children live under great stress, which is transformed into health problems.

Professionals feel restricted in their actions, experience powerlessness. They can settle in the system, this can last for a while, but it can also lead to a burn-out or abandonment of profession.

The person who calls for care or help is also in trouble. He does not feel heard or understood, neither helped nor helped insufficiently. People that can use support come across rescuers who barely have time for them and do not understand them. They meet with an abundance of rules and procedures that they do not know how to handle. The social redundancy they experience is confirmed by this system as it is. They do not even count for those institutions and for people they expect help from. The result is further marginalization.³

These facts indicate that the time is more than ripe to counterbalance the excess of regulations, procedures and evaluation systems. Education must be brought back to normal life. Educators must once again feel that living with young people is not part of it,

(1) BAART, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 758. DE MUYNCK, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

(2) Zie: De MUYNCK, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7-8. Compare: DESMET, M., *Liefde voor het werk in tijden van management. Open brief van een arts*, Lannoo, Tiel, 2009.

(3) WILKEN, J.P., *Over professionaliteit en presentie. Pleidooi voor normatieve professionaliteit bij HBO-opleidingen*, in WILKEN, J.P., (Red.) *De presentiebenadering in het onderwijs. Handreikingen voor introductie en innovatie*, Utrecht, 2006, p. 10.

but that it is the essential activity. Presence is not something of free choice, it is a characteristic of professionalism. Educators benefit from countering a lot of intervention in favor of the idea of presence. It is precisely that conscious but ordinary way of dealing with young people that determines the craftsmanship of an educator.

Young people benefit from it. For the good of children it is good to have a simple and quiet upbringing situation. A way of life in which everyday life comes first is necessary. An approach where the emphasis is not on achievement but on well-being.¹

In short, the presence approach that forms the core of the presentation theory reveals a neglected aspect of many forms of service provision and describes an alternative way of doing things.

A pitfall may be that we would integrate the concept of presence in upbringing, education and assistance in an interventionist manner.

On the other hand, it must be said that it is certainly not the case that the emphasis on presence is new. It '(...) already exists in the field, among gifted and often more mature workers, among professionals who have not let themselves be disturbed by their methodology books and the market-oriented demands of their institutions, and who in some respect have got rid of boasting and bragging which has too often been called professionalization.'²

4. Exposure as starting point: 'Go to the pump'

The research of the will to be intensely close to people and the way in which pastors do this, brings Baart to the development of his presentation theory. The basis of presence is exposure. Exposure to a certain reality with the expectation that it brings something positive.³

Exposure can be presented professionally as a process that encompasses a whole human life, but above all, and that is what happens in the theory of presence, as a process of confrontation and becoming familiar with a concrete assistance reality. This process takes place in four phases, in the terms of Baart, as: (1) oppression, (2) purification, (3) receptivity and (4) dedication.

(1) Oppression concerns the tendency of the professional to have an immediate judgment, to do immediately something, to explain, to control the situation. This tendency must be suppressed in order to get to know the reality that comes from within. One must face one's own prejudices and place them between brackets.

(1) DE MUYNCK, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 13. Compare: TER HORST, W., *Herstel van het gewone leven. Een handleiding voor de alledaagse opvoeder in de problematische opvoedingssituatie*, Houten, Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, 2006. In this practice book ter Horst asks himself what can be done by educators to restore ordinary life. No specialist therapy, but a guideline for daily practice is the central subject. See also the contribution of Colette Schaumont: *Presence in ordinary life*.

(2) BAART, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 814.

(3) *Ibidem*, p. 211.

(2) Purification must be regarded as the result of critical reflection on one's own value judgments and statements. It creates '(...) the space for the others to appear as they (can and) want to be.'¹ Oppression and purification are not necessarily in line with each other but merely form a cyclical movement.

(3) Receptivity points to a process of acceptance of the strange other. This is not automatically the result of the first two stages, it must be actively searched and acquired. Allowing the strange other creates moral intuitions, that manifest themselves actively in taking responsibility for what presents itself. Involvement that has not been imposed from the outside, but originated from within, is the result.

(4) Dedication to the strange other, is thus the necessary final point in the process that Baart indicates as exposure. Receptivity is a necessary preliminary stage and not the desired endpoint of the exposure. Dedication is in terms of Baart: '(...) accepting the intense, faithful, useful and responsible commitment to the other person, which he perceives as a (desirably) good thing.'² Baart is not only concerned in opening up to what the other wishes or what he needs, but also in the total dedication that should be the underlying attitude of it.

Baart states the following: 'The creation of a relationship with the other does not come about because I have something to offer, want to proclaim something or simply on the basis of my personal compassion which, with or without consent, attaches itself to the other person. The relationship is an answer, in which the question, the appeal, the request or the invitation comes from the other side and precedes the answer.'³

Andries Baart calls exposure an exercise to deeply learn to see what is at stake in the lives of people entrusted to the pastor / counselor / educator. The presence approach is the methodical translation of the attitude underlying exposure.⁴

When Don Bosco sends his new collaborator to the pump where the young people hang around, he merely offers him an exposure. The pump can be a rich source of inspiration for the collaborator to acquire the necessary skills, insights, values and virtues that are necessary for working in Valdocco's Oratory.

We mention a number of them, without being exhaustive:

- learning to perceive with all the senses, allowing oneself to immerse in the living environment of the other, to reflect on this and to find a relationship with that environment;
- making contact with the other person in his or her environment in all sorts of possible ways;
- learning to handle a biographical, narrative approach;
- developing their own style and professional basic attitudes;
- learning to 'commit in a relationship';

(1) *Ibidem*, p. 213.

(2) *Ibidem*, p. 214.

(3) *Ibidem*, p. 650.

(4) *Ibidem*, p. 226.

- learning to handle the tension between the rules of the Oratory and the desires of the youngster;
- the ability to promote empowerment by supporting and strengthening the other's forces;
- learning how to connect with social networks and learning how social connections can be strengthened;
- learning to work with dialogue and reflection;
- learning how certain practices can be renewed.¹

(1) Compare: VAN HEIJST, Annelies, *Menslievende zorg. Een ethische kijk op professionaliteit*, Kampen, Uitgeverij Klement, 2005.