

DON BOSCO'S 'EXPRESSIVE' SYSTEM

An alternative perspective for a communication age

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A fundamental truth about human communication is that language and cognition are correlated: the language we use affects the way we think about reality, just as the way we think shapes our language. A powerful clue to understanding the nature of our conceptualisation therefore, is to study how language is used.¹ This is the guiding premise underlying my attempt to propose a different perspective on Don Bosco's Preventive System for our time.

Don Bosco, we known, made prolific use of language. The content and quality of his discourse reveals his identity as a priest-educator with a great

¹ The mutual influence between language and cognition is the stuff of various linguistic and cognitional theories, such as the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget (1896-1980), the generative linguistics of Noam Chomsky, (1928-) and the conceptual metaphor theory of George Lakoff (1941-). As a concrete instance of the language-cognition relationship it is worth considering the differences between Oriental and Occidental familial discourses: Asians have developed specific names for each relative of the extended family in a way that everyone knows exactly how one is connected to the wider family in function of duties and privileges to be observed on important occasions. Familial bonding shapes the discourse, just as the discourse affects the cognitive-emotional sense of belonging to a family. In many Western societies familial bonding hardly extends beyond the parent-child unit, which is why extended family discourse is not elaborately articulated.

predilection for poor and abandoned youngsters. His discourse also reflects the language of his time and place. He called his specific pedagogical experience the 'preventive system'. The title was a 'metaphor', an articulation of the way he conceptualised education.² It was the fruit of nineteenth century progressive Italian educational discourse, and it continues to be the mainstay of Salesian educational terminology even today³ – notwithstanding the giant strides in education, psychology and communication.

One reason why there seems to be a reluctance to let go of traditional metaphors is because we are probably unaware of the role they play in the development of cognition. A metaphor enriches language. It is generally understood to be a figure of speech that suggests a resemblance to something else. We often use metaphors in poetry and rhetoric. But metaphors are not merely the language of poets and preachers. We all speak in metaphors whether we realise it or not. Metaphors not only make our thoughts more vivid and interesting, they actually *structure our perceptions and understanding of the world* around us. Metaphors are the concepts we live by. A change in metaphor can cause a change in conceptualisation.⁴

For this reason, would it not be pertinent to question the relevance of the traditional 'preventive' metaphor for today? Is it not time to 'clothe' the pedagogical philosophy of Don Bosco in a language that is better suited to our times? If this were possible, what new metaphors would best meet this need?

Questions of this kind may seem presumptuous, but they are in no way meant to be irreverent. They do not deny the inherent validity of the preventive system, nor are they an affront to Don Bosco's place in the history of the Catholic Church as 'Father and Teacher of Youth'. In posing these questions we shall tread respectfully as we pursue a creative fidelity to his spirit, without compromising at the same time, the creative relevance to our

² In this paper I use the word 'metaphor' to mean 'metaphorical concept' as explained in the work of Lakoff and Johnson. It is a conceptual construction that is central to the development of thought, not merely a linguistic construction of prose and poetry. Cf. George LAKOFF and Mark JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 4.

³ A recent evidence of this fact is the international congress convened at the Salesian Headquarters in Rome in January 2009. It was entitled 'Preventive System and Human Rights'. See the website: <http://www.donbosco-humanrights.org/dh/j/> (2-8-2009).

⁴ Cf. LAKOFF and JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 3.

context. Precisely here, the words of Don Bosco himself console us: the recommendation he gave to the members of the Third General Chapter in 1883 regarding innovative decisions in the Salesian Society was, "to understand and adapt ourselves to the times in which we live".⁵

Enthused by his spirit of adaptation, sensitive to the demands of creative fidelity, and fully aware of my own limitations, I propose a new metaphor for Don Bosco's educational method. I trust that it has the potential to stimulate further reflection and study in this 150th year since the foundation of the Society of St. Francis de Sales and the 20th year of the Faculty of the Sciences of Communication at the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome.

Don Bosco's 'preventive system'

When referring to Don Bosco's educational method the Salesian Constitutions⁶ explicitly state that the title 'preventive system' is a choice that is Don Bosco's and not ours. Article 20 says: «Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory a spiritual and educational experience *which he called* the "Preventive System"». Article 38 declares: «Don Bosco has handed on to us *his* Preventive System».

Pietro Braido, the foremost scholar and interpreter of Don Bosco's educational method, tells us that for thirty-six years Don Bosco did not have a specific name for it. Only in 1877, in response to repeated requests, he published his *Treatise on the Preventive System*.⁷ Historians Pietro Stella and José Manuel Parello also concur: The booklet assumes the value of "a point of arrival, a settling of experiences and reflection",⁸ "It contains themes and

⁵ *Acts of the Superior Council*, 4, Capitolo Generale III, 1883 (minute of "7 Settembre Sera Ultima Conferenza", ms. of Don Marengo).

⁶ *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, Rome, 1997. (Henceforth *Constitutions*).

⁷ "Il Sistema Preventivo nella Educazione della gioventù" was written by Don Bosco in the spring of 1877 while he was in France. This 'brief sketch' is Don Bosco's only formal statement to explain the principles of his 'educational philosophy'. It appeared in the *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1877, p. 3-13. Cf. the detailed history of the term in Pietro BRAIDO, "Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862). Il cammino del 'preventivo' nella realtà e nei documenti", in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, 27 (1995), Anno XIV – N. 2, pp. 255-320.

⁸ Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella Storia della Religiosità Cattolica*, vol II, Roma: LAS, 1981,

proposals which, even before being written text, were felt aspirations and lived experiences of Don Bosco and his first collaborators.”⁹

It is in this work that he used the new formula,¹⁰ ‘preventive system’, for the first time. It was the name for a pedagogical method that was gaining prominence among educators and educational institutes of his time.¹¹ He would continue to use the term, either verbally or in writing during the decade that followed. Only towards the end of his life did he refer to it as ‘our system of education’ and even, ‘the Salesian spirit’.¹²

Throughout the millennia, the two systems of education, the repressive and preventive, have both coexisted in families and educational institutions in varying degrees. Their relative importance was prominently discussed in France in the early nineteenth century.¹³ The older, repressive system, was adult-centred. The aim was to shape the future adult. The pattern of education adopted was severe and demanding, as used in military-styled academies. The preventive system, by contrast, was child-centred. The educational process took serious account of the various stages of a child’s growth. The pattern of education was family-oriented, along the lines of paternal and maternal love. Some of the organizations that began to adopt the preventive system in educating youngsters, besides Don Bosco’s, were the Marists (1817), the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Teresa Verzeri (1831) and the Rosminians (1838).¹⁴

Don Bosco kept abreast of changes in the educational thinking of his

p. 442 (trans. mine). Stella substantiates his point by tracing elements of the preventive system in Don Bosco’s works preceding 1877.

⁹ José Manuel PRELLEZO, *Sistema educativo ed esperienza oratoriana di don Bosco*, Torino: Elledici, 2000, p. 20 (trans. mine).

¹⁰ For an exhaustive treatment of the formula, see Pietro BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere, il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco*, Roma: LAS, 1999, Chapter IV, pp. 71-92. (English translation by P. Laws).

¹¹ Braido, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 9.

¹² Cf. Pietro BRAIDO, “L’esperienza pedagogica di don Bosco nel suo ‘divenire’”, in *Orientamenti pedagogici*, 36, 1989, p. 27-36.

¹³ Some important French educators of the nineteenth century who debated the relative value of the repressive and preventive systems are: Pierre-Antoine Poulet (1810-1846), Félix Dupanloup (1800-1878), Henri Lacordaire (1802-1861) and Antoine Monfat (1820-1898). BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, Chapter IV, pp. 71-92.

¹⁴ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, Chapter V, pp. 94-124. Dates mentioned refer to the year of foundation.

time.¹⁵ He was fully aware of the distinction between the repressive and preventive methods, as the second paragraph of his *Treatise* indicates. He chose the preventive system "because he felt it was more suited to the times and the youth he was dealing with – even though it was less wide-spread than the repressive system".¹⁶ He did not elaborate it in theoretical terms. "He knowingly experimented and instinctively adopted principles, methods, means, and institutions which allowed him to provide a relatively complete human and Christian formation for young people".¹⁷ He gradually developed "a unified and integral educational proposal"¹⁸ for his Salesians and collaborators.

According to Salesian scholar, Arthur Lenti, "It appears that he adopted the term ['preventive'] in order to give his method a theoretical position, that is, in order to locate it within a general classification in educational history...[the term] *expresses Don Bosco's preference* in educational practice; *but it does not express the richness and complexity* of the method".¹⁹

Indeed, this is a fact that cannot be overlooked: Don Bosco brought to the general understanding of the preventive system a unique quality and style all his own. Braido avers that while some educators²⁰ saw the preventive system as a merely *pre-educational* phase in the process to educational development, Don Bosco did not make the distinction.

Don Bosco never considered the preventive system to be a purely preparatory moment, a protective step, a conditioning measure for education properly so-called. He never intended to restrict it only to its disciplinary aspect or to a way of exercising authority [...] the *positive educational elements both in quality and quantity are far superior* to disciplinary and protective measures.²¹

The educational discourse of Don Bosco's method goes beyond prevention. Educators become loving and caring facilitators who are "constantly

¹⁵ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della Religiosità Cattolica*, vol II, pp. 450-459.

¹⁶ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁹ Arthur J. LENTI (Aldo Giraudo, Ed.), *Don Bosco's History and Spirit*, vol 3, Rome: LAS, p. 156 (italics mine).

²⁰ Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) and Félix Dupanloup (1802- 1878), saw the preventive system as a merely pre-educational phase. Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 7.

²¹ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 7 (italics mine).

present in the life of their pupils, who speak and guide, give advice and correct in a loving manner”.²² It is an educational strategy that is based on Reason, Religion and Loving-kindness both in content and method; a pedagogy that is inspired by the charity of First Corinthians 13;²³ a method that aims to cultivate in a predominantly Catholic Italy of his time, “honest citizens and good Christians”.²⁴

Here lies the dilemma at the heart of our study: if Don Bosco’s educational practice involved so much more than mere prevention – understood in its literal sense as the forestalling of harm – why did he not choose a more positive term to define it? Why did he opt for the limiting *metaphors of protection and prevention*?

Braido uses the same premise underpinning the thrust of our study presented in the introduction. He analyses Don Bosco’s language in order to understand better his conceptual framework. He explains that by selecting the preventive terminology, Don Bosco reveals the way he reflected about the problems of youth of his time. His discourse mirrors “his mindset, which really was ‘preventive’, [which] had inspired him from the first years of his consecration to actually care for ‘poor and abandoned youth’ who needed to be strengthened in advance, to be protected and saved (‘premunire’, ‘proteggere’, ‘salvare’)”.²⁵ Protecting young people from physical and moral danger was the driving energy at the core of his identity as a priest, educator and good shepherd, in imitation of his Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Braido’s interpretation, however, provokes further questions. If, as he maintains, Don Bosco’s educational mindset was ‘preventive’, we need to ask if it was exclusively so. How does one interpret the emphasis he placed on the all-round cultural formation of youngsters at his Oratory – that free, creative and exuberant educational environment at Valdocco, so unlike

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

²³ Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 9.

²⁴ H. HEINZ, *Lehrbuch der systematischen Pädagogik*, Freiburg: Herder, 1964, p. 232 in BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 9.

²⁵ Braido’s opinion is informed by his scholarly analysis of Don Bosco’s use of the ‘preventive system’ during his first twenty years amongst the young and the poor. Cf. BRAIDO, “Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862). Il cammino del “preventivo” nella realtà e nei documenti”, in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, 14, 1995, pp. 255-320. Also: BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, pp. 9-10.

other replicas of the preventive system practised in his time?²⁶ If, on the contrary, we do accept that Don Bosco's thinking far exceeded the limits of a strictly preventive mentality, is there a name we could give those 'positive educational elements' that are 'far superior' both 'in quality and quantity'?²⁷ Could these positive elements in his method be the basis for a shift in discourse, the search for a new metaphor, for reframing a new conceptual system adapted to our times? Would we be faithful to the spirit of a daring founder – someone who had expressed his desire "to be in the vanguard of progress"²⁸ – if we continued to define his educational method in terminology that was avant-garde for his time but retrograde for ours?

The 'preventive' discourse and the search for alternatives

Contemporary voices have expressed the inadequacy of the way the discourse on Don Bosco's pedagogical experience had been framed. Educator, Mario Casotti, considers the expression 'preventive system' a distortion of the original meaning intended by Don Bosco. Prevention, he thinks, was a normal aspect of child-centred development which even Rousseau adopted in the education of his hypothetical protégé, Émile.²⁹ At a convention on the preventive system held in 1978, a request was put forth for substituting the word 'preventive' which risked "inflicting on the method of Don Bosco a reductive qualification".³⁰ Theologian, Sebastian Karotempel, thinks the title 'preventive' is a "misnomer", because the educative experience of Don Bosco is "an extraordinary rich and enriching reality".³¹ "It has been

²⁶ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, Chapter V, pp. 93-124. Rosminians, see the act of educating as a post preventive phase. For example, they were attentive to forestalling harm, but did not use games, outings and theatre as educational strategies in the same way that Bosco did.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7. (See complete quote in footnote 21 above).

²⁸ *Memorie Biografiche*, vol. 19, p. 81. (Henceforth MB for the Italian version, BM [meaning 'Biographical Memoirs'] for the English version).

²⁹ Mario CASOTTI, *Il metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, Brescia: La Scuola, 1960, pp. 14-16.

³⁰ Cf. "Le principali difficoltà emerse dal dibattito", in Giuseppe AUBRY - Edmundo VECCHI - Luciano CIAN, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, Milano-Bologna, 3-4 novembre, 1978 (mimeograph, pages not numbered).

³¹ Sebastian KAROTEMPEL, "Don Bosco's Method of Education in the Asian Context"

saddled too long with a wrong, negative, inaccurate or inadequate name [...] often misunderstood to mean far less than the wider, more elevating reality”.³² Historian, Michael Ribotta, believes that Don Bosco’s method “was neither ‘preventive’ nor a ‘system’,”³³ and its use deserves closer scrutiny”.³⁴ Psychologist, Umberto Fontana, writing at the beginning of the new millennium, claims that “the time is right” to answer “a need felt by many Salesians to transcribe the preventive system in current terminology without distorting its spirit”.³⁵

With regard to alternative suggestions, Braido calls it, *Don Bosco’s pedagogical experience*, a praxis that constantly integrated reflection and experimentation.³⁶ Karotemprel prefers “*Don Bosco’s Educative Method*... [to] highlight the specific and highly personal character of a new formative educative approach”.³⁷ Ribotta suggests *the Salesian Way*, because “it is the spirit of Francis [de Sales] that goes to the very core of the educational practices and attitudes that Don Bosco advocated”.³⁸ Fontana refers to it as *Don Bosco’s Pedagogical Intuition* and ventures to propose scientific tools to rearticulate it from a psychological perspective.³⁹

If a new way of framing the discourse is needed, as I believe it is, what would be at stake? What would be the most suitable choice?

Semantics and semiotics teach us the importance of appropriate nam-

in *Don Bosco’s Charism and Asian Culture*, Dimapur: Salesian College Publications, 1988, p. 28.

³² KAROTEMPREL, *Don Bosco’s Charism*, p. 28.

³³ It is not my intention to take issue with the word ‘system’ as the focus of my argument is the contemporary adaptation of the ‘preventive’ terminology rather than its historical analysis within Don Bosco’s pedagogical experience. Thanks to much reflection and analysis on the ‘preventive system’ over the years, it would not be out of place to recognize the evolution of his experience into a ‘system of education’ in its own right, where each of its parts contribute to the efficient functioning of an integrated whole.

³⁴ Michael RIBOTTA, “Tough Love is not the answer, Don Bosco’s view on Punishments”, in *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Vol. 4/1, 1995, pp. 81-82 (Henceforth JSS).

³⁵ Umberto FONTANA, *Relazione, segreto di ogni educazione*, Turin: Elledici, 2000, p. 121.

³⁶ Cf. BRAIDO, *Orientamenti pedagogici*, 36, pp. 27-36. See also BRAIDO, *Prevenire non Reprimere*, p. 10.

³⁷ KAROTEMPREL, *Don Bosco’s Charism*, p. 60.

³⁸ RIBOTTA, JSS, Vol. 4/1, pp. 81-82.

³⁹ FONTANA, *Relazione, segreto di ogni educazione*, p. 31. The scientific tools he proposes are in the second half of the book, Chapters V and VI, pp. 85-129.

ing. Especially when referring to systems, groups, movements or organisations, a name takes on symbolic meaning. It becomes a mark of identity, an essential point of reference. On the internal front, it indicates the goal of the organisation, which in turn defines its scope, declares the values it upholds and gives its adherents a sense of belonging. On the external front, it is the 'face' by which the organization is recognized by non-members in an increasingly competitive clash of symbols. Its relevance, however, will have to endure the passage of time, the variation of cultural differences and the risk of misinterpretation. The only way to save it from oblivion is through creative adaptation. This would imply a faithfulness to the *spirit* of tradition although not necessarily to the letter.

A well chosen name is a sign of unity of purpose, a motivating centre around which members strive to live in harmony with their inherited past, with their present challenges and with their future hopes. One of these hopes is to be convincingly attractive to others who do not as yet belong. The act of renaming a symbol or reframing the metaphors an organization thinks by is never a fortuitous exercise, especially when it prides itself on a heritage that has much at stake.⁴⁰

If one looks at the options suggested above as conceptual metaphors, one notes the emphasis placed on the *charismatic figure* of the founder, and in Ribotta's case, the inspiration he received from his patron St. Francis de Sales. Don Bosco is perceived as the *source* of the 'method', 'experience', 'way' or 'intuition'. Most organizations and movements prefer to be known by the name of their founders. Today, 150 years after the Congregation was established, it makes perfect sense to rechristen the Salesian preventive system after its founder and to call it 'Don Bosco's Educational Method'. Entitling it in this manner is appealing because Don Bosco's name continues to carry credibility, even beyond Catholic circles, as for instance in Asia and parts of Africa. His charm, his character and his charisma qualify his pedagogy, give it the stamp of respectability and distinguish it from all others.

Having said that, we cannot overlook the fact that Don Bosco chose to make *explicit mention of the method* in his own name-giving exercise. Underly-

⁴⁰ This explains why the task of reframing an organization's official discourse is not a very welcome exercise. It is often greeted with scepticism, especially if propositioned by those outside its authoritative inner circle. The life-stories of innovators down the ages is proof enough.

ing the label we see a threefold desire: to identify the method, to show that it was in keeping with the times, and to disassociate it from the repressive system. The suggested, 'Don Bosco's Method of Education' and its variations mentioned above lack these precise characteristics.

Driven by a search for answers to these criteria and motivated by my belief in the relevance of Don Bosco's educational uniqueness in our communication age, I propose that we begin to explore *metaphors of growth* which I will encapsulate in the term 'expression'. My aim is to help us make the conceptual shift to essentially positive elements that are present but not sufficiently emphasized in the traditional preventive system discourse. One way to facilitate this new thinking is by renaming the educational method itself. I propose: 'The Expressive System' or 'The Expressive Way' or in contexts beyond Salesian circles, 'Don Bosco's Expressive Education'.⁴¹

The term 'expressive' and its meanings

The term 'expressive' is preferred, primarily because it is an antonym of the word 'repressive'. To a journalist in Paris, Don Bosco dubbed all repressive techniques in education "anathema".⁴² In the fourth paragraph of his *Treatise*, he highlights the radical contrast of the repressive system with his own method in these words: «Quite different from this [repressive method] and I might even say *opposed to it*, is the preventive system...[which] excludes all violent punishment, and tries to do without even the slightest chastisement».⁴³

Right from his prophetic dream at the age of nine, he grew up with the conviction that the only way to win hearts was the way of non-violence and

⁴¹ It is not my intention to take issue with the word 'system' as the focus of my argument is the contemporary adaptation of the 'preventive' terminology rather than its historical analysis within Don Bosco's pedagogical experience. However, thanks to much reflection and analysis on the 'preventive system' during the past 150 years, I think it is appropriate to recognize the evolution of Don Bosco's experience into a 'system of education' in its own right, where each of its parts contribute to the efficient functioning of an integrated whole.

⁴² *BM*, vol 16, pp. 167-168.

⁴³ Don BOSCO, 'The Preventive System in the Education of the Young', in *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, Roma, 1997, p. 247 (italics mine).

affection: «not by blows but by gentleness and love».⁴⁴ In his *Memoirs of the Oratory* he gives us a clue into his perception of an ideal educator, and for our purpose, a view of 'expressive education' at its best.

Professor Banaudi was a model teacher. Without having recourse to corporal punishment, he succeeded in making all his pupils respect and love him. He loved them all as if they were his own sons, and they loved him like an affectionate father.

To show our appreciation, we planned a surprise for his feast day. We decided to write both poetic and prose pieces for the celebration, and we had little presents which we thought he would especially like. The event was a splendid success. Our teacher was pleased beyond words, and as a token of appreciation, he took us on a picnic in the country. It was a wonderful day; both teacher and pupils were of one spirit, and each of us strove for ways to express the joy in his heart.⁴⁵

This passage reveals Don Bosco's educational values: non-violence, mutual respect, love, appreciation, parent-child rapport, oneness of spirit, self-expression, peer-solidarity, creativity, games, contact with nature, joy. The metaphors he uses give us a clue to how he conceptualised ideal education, or what we propose to call an 'education for expression'.

It must be noted, however, that the use of the word 'expression' to describe Don Bosco's method is not new. An early reference to the term is by Rt. Rev. William Turner, D.D., Bishop of Buffalo, USA, in his panegyric in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral on February 16, 1930. Ribotta summarizes it as follows:

[Bishop Turner] went on to say that for Don Bosco, prayer was a means of expression. Song was a means of expression. The Sacraments were not only sources of grace, but also a means of expression. So were recreations, hikes in the country, games, amateur theatricals. All these Don Bosco embodied in his system of education, sanctifying them, ennobling them, lifting them up by his religious inspiration. For Don Bosco the positive was better than the negative, the constructive more useful than the destructive. In a word: Expression is better than repression.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, (Antonio da SILVA FERREIRA, Ed.), Roma: LAS, 1991, p. 35. (Henceforth *MO*)

⁴⁵ *MO*, p. 71.

⁴⁶ RIBOTTA, *JSS*, Vol. 4/1, p. 83, footnote no. 5. The occasion was the commemoration of Don Bosco's beatification. Also see: William TURNER, "Expression, Not Repression!" in *The Catholic Mind*, vol. 28, 1930, pp. 153-59.

Etymologically the word ‘to express’ comes from the Medieval Latin combination that signifies “to press out” probably like “clay that takes form under pressure”⁴⁷ It is the act of “setting forth in words”, the power of “indicating feeling, spirit, attitude, character, as on the face, in the voice, or in artistic execution”, or the “act of representing [meaning] as by symbols”.⁴⁸

The verb ‘to express’ is similar to the verb ‘to educate’, which etymologically means “educere” to draw forth.⁴⁹ The word ‘educer’ means, “to bring out something potential or latent, to elicit or to develop”.⁵⁰

One differs from the other in that the act of expressing is often reflexive while the act of educating is other-directed. When expressing, the agent who ‘presses out’, who ‘sets forth’ who ‘indicates’ or ‘represents’ is one and the same: ‘She expresses herself.’ In the act of educating, instead, the agent who ‘draws forth’, does so from another: ‘The teacher educates the students.’

In their combined form, the two words ‘expressive education’ could mean educating students to express themselves. This generally has two different interpretations, both of which have their roots in the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Romanticism. The first is a type of education that promotes artistic development. It helps the pupil “test reality in an environment which encourages him to ‘try out’ creative forms and to expand his awareness of them”.⁵¹ Some of these forms of expression are dramatic play, art, and creative movement.⁵²

The second meaning of ‘expressive education’ is more comprehensive

⁴⁷ See ‘express’ in Douglas HARPER, *Online Etymological Dictionary*, 2001, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=e&p=1>.

⁴⁸ See ‘expression’ in *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 01 May. 2008: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/expression>.

⁴⁹ See ‘educate’ in HARPER, *Online Etymological Dictionary*, 2001, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=educate&searchmode=none>.

⁵⁰ See ‘educer’ in *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 01 May. 2009: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/educer>.

⁵¹ Nancy ELMAN and Susan GROSS, *The Training of Educational Personnel in Expressive Education*, Pittsburgh Univ., PA. Dept. of Counselor Education, 1976, quote taken from the Abstract.

⁵² Prominent educational psychologists of the twentieth century who have encouraged expressive education of this kind are John Dewey (1859-1952), Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Lev Vygotsky, (1896-1934), J. Piaget (1896-1980).

and includes the first. It is a type of education that is child-centred, that nurtures the development of the child's potential in a climate of liberty, creativity and encouragement. In the U.S.A. a strand of this form of education developed as individualism and social liberalism. It emphasized individual utilitarianism, and the language of psychology and self-actualisation over that of morality or religion.⁵³ The denial of religion as essential to education was a fruit of European Enlightenment anthropology:

The philosophy of the Enlightenment insisted on man's essential autonomy: man is responsible to himself, to his own rational interests, to his self-development, and, by an inescapable extension, to the welfare of his fellow man. For the philosophers, man was not a sinner, at least not by nature; human nature – and this argument was subversive, in fact revolutionary, in their day – is by origin good, or at least neutral. Despite the undeniable power of man's antisocial passions, therefore, the individual may hope for improvement through his own efforts – through education, participation in politics, activity in behalf of reform, but not through prayer.⁵⁴

Linked as it is to the individualistic and secular branches of thought, the word 'expression' has come to signify, in its most restricted meaning, a type of self-actualisation that one is capable of achieving on one's own.

Don Bosco's expressive education, as we will understand it, underscores most of the meanings mentioned above, from the simple dictionary significance of 'pressing out' the best of one's potential, to the psychologically rich and complex 'self-actualisation'. However, it transcends the individualism and religionlessness of Enlightenment thinking. It appreciates the quest for individual growth and fully acknowledges its place within the spiritual journey of a believing and caring environment. It does not deny a growing person the right to one of the most profound interior needs of the human being: the quest for complete happiness.

Our expressive education discourse is therefore about enhancing personal growth and striving for joy. It is a testimony to the truth that *we grow*

⁵³ For more on the subject see, Warren A. NORD, *Religion & American education: rethinking a national dilemma*, North Carolina: UNC Press, 1995, p. 89.

⁵⁴ Peter GAY, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*, 1966 cited in HARPER, *Online Etymological Dictionary*: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=education&searchmode=none>.

*best when we grow from within.*⁵⁵ Growing is a harmonious and serene interplay of life and afterlife, of health and holiness, of reason and faith, of personal integrity and community togetherness – all invaluable experiences of the human condition. It is a realistic kind of education (opposed to classical Romanticism) that is aware of problems, confronts them, forestalls future harm and watches caringly over young impressionable minds. Yet this protective approach is not protectionism. On the contrary, it nurtures the youngster's resilience by inculcating self-awareness, self-esteem, self-discipline and self-reliance. It is a faith-based education because it fosters a personal, loving relationship with the Author of Life. Growing up is a journey towards perfect self-expression with the daily awareness and discipline of following God's will. What is consoling in Don Bosco's expressive way, is that the journey is never undertaken alone. It is lived out in cooperation with the educator, with one's peers and with the joy of belonging to a reasoning, believing and loving community. It 'educes' the development of youngsters at all stages of their growth by training them to 'press out' and 'press forward', no matter how tragic their past or how limited their capacities. Each child is equipped with the power to "bloom wherever planted".⁵⁶

For the purpose of our discussion therefore, we will define Don Bosco's expressive education as *a commitment to draw out the potential latent in the educand so as to orientate him or her towards an all-round maturity.*⁵⁷ The expressive educator encourages the student "to be fully who one is personally called to be and to strive to be that perfectly"⁵⁸ – an aphorism that is at the heart of the

⁵⁵ In his diary, Fr. Barberis notes that the boys of the Oratory received the sacraments "with great regularity and devotion. Consequently the boys act and obey *from conviction* rather than from fear of punishment." Cf. Giulio BARBERIS, Notebook II, 1 FDBM 834 A3, in, LENTI, "Saint with a Human Face", *JSS*, 8:2 fall 1997, p. 193 (italics mine).

⁵⁶ A popular saying attributed to St. Francis de Sales. See the slogan "Bloom where you are planted," on the official website of the The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (Fransalians/MSFS) which was founded in 1838 by Fr. Peter Marie-Mermier, under the patronage of the Saint: <http://www.fransalians.com/> (3-8-2009).

⁵⁷ Lenti agrees: «Don Bosco had a comprehensive concept of education. It entailed the total development of the person, bringing out to the best possible effect the person's potentialities in view of the individual's functioning as a mature Christian adult in society – a good citizen and a good Christian, as he would say». LENTI, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, vol. 3, p. 139. See also, Luciano CIAN, *Il 'Sistema Preventivo' di Don Bosco e I lineamenti caratteristici del suo stile*, Rome: Elle Di Ci, 1978, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Literally: «Do not desire to be who you are not, but strive to be who you are per-

humanistic spirituality of Don Bosco's patron saint, Francis de Sales: a saint he loved and imitated to the point of placing under his patronage his first Oratory, his first Church and his first Religious Society. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, his biographer, confirms: «Insofar as education and public instruction were concerned, [Don Bosco] adjudged the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales to be the most suitable to the times».⁵⁹ In perfect accord with the Christian humanism of de Sales, Don Bosco believed that "in every youngster, even the most wretched, a point of goodness is accessible, and it is the primary duty of the educator to discover that spot, that sensitive cord of the heart so as *to draw out the best in the young person*".⁶⁰ In the words of educator-psychologist, Luciano Cian:

Don Bosco's method is born of an attentive and loving presence among youth; a presence that awakens their consciousness because it meets them exactly where they are. It is a style that is not just a preoccupation to defend them from dangers for fear of risks and eventual errors (as if to keep them in a perpetual state of childhood directed and nurtured by adults), but is a commitment to propose, to motivate, to open up and to encourage the person *to become that which he or she originally is and should be*, according to that project of life and those choices which one intuitively understands as the core of *one's personal vocation*.⁶¹

Don Bosco's own personality was a model of the type of expression he wanted to elude from his students. If, in the logic of our inquiry, his language and style of writing is any indication of his conceptualisation, we have evidence to suggest that he "was spontaneous, to the point, concrete: the very opposite of the 19th century rhetoric that bogged down so many authors. Don Bosco made no pretensions to elegance; and actually because of this he developed an individual style that set him among the top-ranking

fectly». The original citation: «Ne désirez point de n'être pas ce que vous êtes, mais désirez d'être fort bien ce que vous êtes.». Cf. Francis DE SALES, "Letter of St. Francis de Sales to the wife of the President Brulart of Dijon", in *Opere Complete di San Francesco di Sales* (Anancy edition), vol. XIII, p. 291.

⁵⁹ MB, vol. II, pp. 253-254, cited by Morand WIRTH, *Francesco di Sales e l'Educazione, Formazione umana e umanesimo integrale*, Roma: LAS, 2006, p. 591.

⁶⁰ MB, vol. 5, 367, cited by BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, pp. 203-204 (trans. and italics mine).

⁶¹ CIAN, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, p. 13 (trans. and italics mine).

authors of his time”.⁶² Such freedom, adaptation and enterprise can also be seen in the non-religious visage he ‘stubbornly’ gave to his ‘Salesian Society’ in a climate of anti-clericalism and at a time when the government was repressing religious congregations throughout Italy. He wanted his sons to be “free citizens and religious at the same time”.⁶³ He even “baited and hooked them”⁶⁴ to join him without the slightest reference to becoming members of a religious order. Barberis recalls that such explicit talk “would have scared us all away”.⁶⁵

The real bait, they would learn, was his calm and serene comportment that was based on a healthy self-confidence, a genuine solicitude for the good of his underprivileged neighbour and an interior union with God. In 1876, at a conference to the leaders of his educational institutions he shared the secret of his courage to take on daring initiatives on behalf of poor and abandoned youth:

The reason why we *press forward* and never look back is that we are walking with certainty. Before any undertaking we have to ascertain God’s will in that regard. Once we have this certainty we *press forward*. From then on difficulties which may be met with on the way are of no consequence. If God wills it, we have nothing to fear.⁶⁶

Expression was the *goal* of all his educational and missionary endeavours. It was also the driving energy sustaining his dream to create through-

⁶² E. VALENTINI, *Don Bosco and the Apostolate of the Press*, Turin: SEI, 1957, pp. 7-8. That he was recognised as an author of rank is evident from the state award he received for *History of Italy* by the Minister of Education, Giovanni Lanza (MB, vol. 5, p. 305). He also received an award for the same work from Niccolò Tommaseo (MB, vol 6, p. 291).

⁶³ Giovanni BONETTI, *St. John Bosco’s Early Apostolate*, (1934), p. 345, in LENTI, *JJS*, vol. 8, 2, fall 1997, p. 187.

⁶⁴ See full quotation in the next footnote.

⁶⁵ «The four of us agreed, and so would all other first-generation priests and brothers, that if Don Bosco had openly proposed to us life in a religious order none of us would have entered. [He] would simply use such expressions as, ‘Do you love Don Bosco? Would you like to do your seminary studies here at the Oratory? Would you like to help Don Bosco when the time comes?’ [...] This is how we were baited and hooked». BARBERIS, Notebook, III, pp. 43-45, FDBM, 835 D6-8, quoted in LENTI, *JJS*, vol. 8, 2, fall 1997, p. 187.

⁶⁶ These words were delivered at a conference for Rectors, February 6, 1876. Cf. BARBERIS, Notebook IV, 53 FDBM 837 E1. quoted in LENTI, *JJS*, vol. 8, 2, fall 1997, p. 189 (italics mine).

out the world and for all time, the conditions and the means to favour the growth of a more happy and expressive youngster.

Don Bosco's expressive education in practice

When one compares Don Bosco's own elaboration of the theory and praxis of his educational pedagogy, one is struck by how much his actions favouring expressive education exceed his verbal articulations of their expressiveness. His discourse is framed in the language of the preventive system of his time and is pastoral or moral in substance. His concrete actions, however, contain valuable 'intuitions' that predate conclusions reached by contemporary educational psychology.⁶⁷ His actions speak louder than his words, and, in some instances, prophetically ahead of nineteenth century educational discourse.

We now take a tour of some of these actions in order to elicit from them those un-articulated yet clearly growth-enhancing instances at the Valdocco Oratory. This is an attempt to look back and retrieve the expressive qualities of his initiatives that have historically augmented meaning and generated practices which inform and enrich the expressive capacities of the Salesian education system in which they presently reside.

Due to the vast amount of material available and the limitations of space, we shall restrict our presentation to a few pertinent examples. They are elaborated as a tripartite integrated structure consisting of the *goal*, the *ecology* or preconditions necessary for the process of its cultivation and the *means* through which it is realised.

1. The goal of Don Bosco's expressive education

The pursuit of happiness fascinated Don Bosco since his childhood. During his student years at Chieri, he rallied his companions around the *Società dell'Allegria* or the 'Happiness Club'.⁶⁸ As a young and dynamic priest-educator he was inspired by St. Philip Neri to make joy (through gentleness and charity) the goal of all his educational efforts. The result was the crea-

⁶⁷ Cf. FONTANA, *Relazione, segreto di ogni educazione*, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁸ MO, p. 59.

tion of his best gift to youngsters: an innovative and exuberant spirituality of joy; an education to happiness.

For instance, we see how he surprises both Dominic Savio and Francis Besucco who mistakenly believed that being good Christians involved long faces, laborious prayers and difficult penances – a fruit of the prevalent Jansenist piety.⁶⁹ Don Bosco offered his boys an uncomplicated path to holiness: constancy in cheerfulness and perseverance in the fulfilment of one's duties.⁷⁰ In the first edition of *Il giovane provveduto* (1847) he appealed to young people to live a life of joy:

My dear youngsters, I love you all from my heart, and it is enough that you are young for me to love you very much. I can assure that you can find many inspiring books written by persons much more virtuous and learned than I am, but with difficulty will you find anyone who loves you in the Lord, and who desires your *true happiness* more than I do. And *I will teach you a way to be happy both in this life and in the next*".⁷¹

Philosopher Joaquim D'Souza, comments: «Right from the beginning Don Bosco offers the young a way to happiness that is enduring, permanent, eternal. He offers them a conception of happiness that is both immanent (in this life) and transcendent (in the next), and by implication, a view of life that has its source and goal in God».⁷² Don Bosco's expressive way was a commitment "to serve the Lord with gladness".⁷³ Happiness was holiness, and *holiness was self-expression at its best*.

⁶⁹ LENTI, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, Rome: LAS, 2008, p. 40.

⁷⁰ Cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio Young pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, Torino: Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, 1880, Chapter 15; and Giovanni BOSCO, *The young shepherd of the Alps, or the life of the young Francis Besucco of Argentera*, Torino: Tipografia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, 1878, and Chapter 17.

⁷¹ Saint John BOSCO, *Giovane Provveduto: The Companion of Youth*, (1847), English version, London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938, cited in LENTI, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, p. 40 (italics mine).

⁷² Joaquim D'SOUZA, "Educating to a happy life - the Don Bosco Way" in <http://donboscosway.blogspot.com/2008/07/resources.html>.

⁷³ The memory that lingered on at the end of his life was the 'joyful' experience of the first Oratory years, when recreation time was "full of life, full of movement, full of fun [...] There was singing and laughing on all sides." LENTI, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, p. 49.

Moreover, in a time when images of holiness portrayed sorrowful saints clutching rosaries, holding crucifixes, contemplating skulls or glancing heaven-ward, photographs of Don Bosco are conspicuous for his smile. He has the distinction of being called "the saint with the merry face"⁷⁴ by internationally renowned semiologist, Umberto Eco.

2. The ecology of Don Bosco's expressive education

Don Bosco's own experience as a farm boy impressed upon him the need for preparing the ground before planting the seed. Wise farmers ensure that the soil is fertile to assist the sprouting of new shoots. They foster the type of environment required to nurture the particular crop they wish to cultivate. They are attentive to the right amount of air, sunlight, water and nourishment throughout the process of germination. They are vigilant in forestalling pests from impeding growth. The goal and purpose of the whole endeavour is *maturation*: to reap a bountiful harvest, to produce plentiful fruit, or to let the flowers bloom.

Don Bosco's pedagogy was patterned on this simple peasant logic. It was first and fundamentally an *ecology of expression* before it became an education to expressivity. The invigorating atmosphere of the festive Oratory⁷⁵ was the precondition for motivating holistic growth.

2.1. Freedom of expression

A free and friendly environment was one of the foundations for good health and happiness. This is why historically and pedagogically the Oratory preceded the School⁷⁶ – a strategy that had become standard missionary practice especially for many Salesian pioneers. The first Oratory at Valdoc-

⁷⁴ The quotation in Italian is: "il santo, con il volto ilare". Umberto ECO, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*, Milano: Bompiani, 2004, p. 440.

⁷⁵ Cf. Francis DESRAMAUT, "La festa salesiana ai tempi di Don Bosco", in *La festa nell'esperienza giovanile del mondo Salesiano*. Colloqui Internazionali sulla vita salesiana 14 - Nuova serie 3 (Vienna, 23-28 agosto 1987), a cura di Cosimo SEMERARO, Torino-Leumann: LDC, 1988, pp. 97-98.

⁷⁶ Bruno BELLERATE, "Don Bosco's Humanistic Approach", in Patrick EGAN and Mario MIDALI (Eds.), *Don Bosco's Place in History*, Roma: LAS, 1993, p. 328.

co was an open, cheerful and welcoming place where young people could “have full liberty to jump, run and make as much noise as they please.”⁷⁷ Only in such a free atmosphere could the potential latent in every youngster be tapped. When a journalist once asked him to define his educational method, he replied:

Very simply put: leave the young full liberty to do the things that they like best. The important thing is to discover in them the seeds of good disposition and try to develop these. And since everyone likes to do only what he knows he can do well, I get my students to work together with much fervour and love. This is the principle I follow. I dare say that in 46 years I have never inflicted a single punishment, and my students love me for it.⁷⁸

John Villa, from Ponderano, a boy who frequented Don Bosco’s Oratory testifies:

I noticed that Don Bosco made a point of allowing the boys to be active and enjoy their games in order to attract them. The more noise they made at play, the happier he seemed to be. Whenever he saw us looking lonesome or not quite as lively as usual, he would leave no stone unturned until he had cheered us up again with new games and new ideas...⁷⁹

Many educators found Don Bosco’s success an enigma. French playwright, critic and poet, Henri Ghéon, admitted that his secret with youngsters was truly exceptional. “A work founded upon authority has some chance of survival, [...] a work founded upon liberty should, humanly speaking, engender only anarchy. And Don Bosco’s was founded upon liberty”.⁸⁰ And it still was not anarchic.

⁷⁷ “The Preventive System” in *Constitutions*, p. 249.

⁷⁸ MB, vol. 17, (p. ?). Interview published in *Journal de Rome*, 25-4-1884 (trans. mine). Cited by Mario CASOTTI, “Don Bosco e la pedagogia del suo tempo” in *Giovanni Bosco: Il Metodo Preventivo con Testimonianze e altri scritti educativi inediti*, Brescia: La Scuola (7^a Ed.): <http://www.preghiereagesuemaria.it/libri/don%20bosco%20e%20la%20pedagogia%20del%20suo%20tempo.htm> (22-7-2009).

⁷⁹ BM, vol. 5, pp. 190-191.

⁸⁰ H. GHEON, *The Secret of St. John Bosco*, (Trans. F. J. Sheed) London: Sheed and Ward, 1954, p. 194.

2.2. Expression rooted in Grace

The secret of Don Bosco's system, the reason why his child-centred, free expression differed radically from other libertarian educators was that it was founded on religious and moral principles of the Catholic Church. The liberty he encouraged was a cultivated and en-graced freedom. Cassotti explains this revolutionary uniqueness:

Leave young people 'full liberty!' Never from Rousseau to Ferrière has such a revolutionary formula been heard. [...] We could almost accuse Don Bosco of naturalism, if we did not know that his liberty is not the one that is understood commonly with its false freedoms of natural human beings that are made up of arbitrary and capricious choices [...] No: the 'liberty' of Don Bosco includes authority, precisely because it is a liberty of the individual made free in Christ and renewed by grace: which therefore loves authority and is loved by authority: and where there is love, difficulties surrender and the constraints disappear. In this sense, the formula of Don Bosco is similar to that of Saint Augustine: "*Ama et fac quod vis*" – Love and do what you will.⁸¹

The sacraments of confession and holy communion were the internal motivators of Don Bosco's education. He called them its "pillars".⁸² Together with the monthly 'exercise for a happy death' they became sources of renewable energy for encounters with God in neighbour. Don Bosco was the first to set the example by going weekly to confession "not privately, but, as he did throughout his life, publicly in church, in view of all the people".⁸³ Yet, when encouraging his boys to frequent the sacraments,

[t]here was no obligation to secure a confession certificate. No boy could be reprimanded for staying away from confession...Nor would Don Bosco hear of any fixed arrangement for confession: the boys were to be heard as they came, so that anyone wanting to withdraw could do so unnoticed. The same rule applied to Holy Communion. When on solemn feast days the boys were treated to a breakfast, everybody was welcome whether he had gone to Communion or not.⁸⁴

⁸¹ CASOTTI, "Don Bosco e la pedagogia del suo tempo" in *Giovanni Bosco*, website mentioned above.

⁸² Cf. "The Preventive System", *Constitutions*, p. 249.

⁸³ *BM*, vol. 2, p. 125.

⁸⁴ *BM*, vol. 3, pp. 66-67.

The life of grace was based on respect for human dignity. It was a free choice to be pursued by force of internal conviction not external regimentation. But realist as he was, Don Bosco foresaw the importance of supporting the young person's delicate interior journey throughout the difficult period of adolescence. He therefore wrote a prayer book which he called, *Il giovane provveduto* – a metaphoric title to encourage and *equip* believing youngsters who wish to be the consolation of their parents, the honour of their country, good citizens of planet earth and champions of paradise.⁸⁵ Building spiritual resiliency at an early age was the core of Don Bosco's educational obsession.

2.3. Expressed rapport

How could a young priest get street urchins to voluntarily frequent the sacraments in a time of growing anticlerical propaganda? Don Bosco's secret was rapport. He took pains to cultivate a personal, friendly relationship with each of his pupils. However, he did not merely love them. He *showed them* that he did. The pages of his *Letter from Rome* are full of aphorisms for educators to cultivate a healthy expressed rapport with their students: «If you want to be loved, *you must make it clear* that you love».⁸⁶ It is not sufficient to love, «they themselves *must know* that they are loved.»⁸⁷ «Learn to make yourself loved before you make yourself feared».⁸⁸

There is only one way to a genuine expression of love: *to become one with* – the classical 'incarnational' approach. To let youngsters know that they are loved, they have to be "loved in the *things they like*".⁸⁹ It is the only tangible way to the hearts of young people – to become one with them in their

⁸⁵ Cf. *Alla Gioventù* (p. 5), OE II 187, cited by Pietro BRAIDO, "Una formula dell'umanesimo educativo di don Bosco: 'Buon cristiano e onesto cittadino'", in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, 24 (1994), Anno XIII, N. 1, p. 51 (trans. mine).

⁸⁶ Don BOSCO, 'Letter from Rome', *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, Rome, 1997, p. 259.

⁸⁷ 'Letter from Rome', *Constitutions*, p. 257.

⁸⁸ Stella draws attention to Don Bosco's editing of one of his favourite sayings: "Learn to make yourself loved instead of feared" (1863). "Learn to make yourself loved, if you wish to make yourself feared" (1876). "Learn to make yourself loved before you make yourself feared" (1886). STELLA, *Don Bosco nella Storia*, vol II, p. 442 (trans. mine).

⁸⁹ 'Letter from Rome', *Constitutions*, p. 257.

games so that they become one with their educators in the values they (the educators) live by. This concrete and sincere display of affection melts the stoniest hearts and breaks down the barriers of suspicion. In such a climate of love, young people begin to trust and become trustworthy. They open up to a transparent, generous and joyful relationship conducive to learning. Don Bosco often repeated: «Without affection there is no confidence, and without confidence, no education».⁹⁰

2.4. Assisted Expression

A presence that assists, accompanies and guides is a genuine form of expressed rapport. The more youngsters are at risk the greater the need of protecting and preventing them from harm; the more urgent the task of assisting them on the road to intrapersonal and interpersonal freedom.⁹¹ Don Bosco never understood assistance as a form of supervision or surveillance.⁹² To him, it was a way of *being with* youngsters, a 'journeying with the young' on their way to maturity. For him the concept was as comprehensive as education itself. He himself set the example. He recalls the early days of the Oratory: «I gave all my time to *assisting* my youngsters. During the week I would go to visit them at their work in factories or workshops. Not only were the youngsters happy to see a friend *taking care* of them, their employers [too] were pleased».⁹³

Assistance is an exacting commitment for the educator. It means taking time and trouble to cultivate the freedom necessary so that children become fully what they are called by God to be. Don Bosco himself admits the difficulty. He believes that the burden is lessened if applied with zeal; after all, "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

⁹⁰ Augustine AUFRAY, *Saint John Bosco*, Isag-Colle Don Bosco, Asti, Italy, 1964, p. 255.

⁹¹ It is worth mentioning that Lenti sees prevention-protection-assistance as 'strategies' of Don Bosco's educational method. I consider these key aspects of the 'prevention system' as essential preconditions that accompany the whole process towards juvenile maturation. Cf. LENTI, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, vol. 3, pp. 144, 155-157.

⁹² Augustine AUFRAY, "Assistance versus Supervision in Salesian Education: Creating an Educational Environment. St. John Bosco's Preventive System of Education," New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publishers, date unknown, pamphlet.

⁹³ MO, pp. 197-198 in LENTI, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, vol. 3, p. 158.

order to attain his object, which is the civic, moral and intellectual education of his pupils".⁹⁴ The whole of Don Bosco's *Letter from Rome* is a plea to educators to express their love for their students through the patient and time-consuming practice of an attentive, growth-enhancing assistance of their students.⁹⁵

2.5. Expression based on reason

Reason was like the pivot that balanced a loving relationship between educator and student from degenerating into mere sentimentality. It checked the student's life of grace from falling into superstition, scrupulosity or fanaticism. It helped free expression from turning into undisciplined anarchy with the reasonable use of rules and corrections in a climate of love. Educator, John Morrison, comments:

Don Bosco believed that if the student comprehended the reasonableness of what he was doing, or what was being done, he did not need external and repressive measures inflicted on him for the maintenance of discipline. Moreover, this pervading sense of reasonableness brought out in the child a desire to be co-operative, a self-discipline *from within* and not one controlled by external and repressive forces.⁹⁶

While Don Bosco rejected the repressive method, he fostered discipline in a friendly and family atmosphere. It facilitated a balance of both individual and group expression. There were times, however, when corrections were necessary and unavoidable, because of "the thoughtlessness of youth which in one moment forgets the rules of discipline and the punishments which they threaten. Consequently a child often becomes culpable and deserving of punishment which he quite forgot when heedlessly committing the fault which he would certainly have avoided had a friendly voice warned him".⁹⁷ Don Bosco's way of correcting was through a cordial presence, a friendly 'assistance'. His reasonableness is admirable, as can be seen in the advice to a teacher who asked him for tips on correction:

⁹⁴ Cf. "The Preventive System", *Constitutions*, p. 251.

⁹⁵ 'Letter from Rome', *Constitutions*, pp. 254-264.

⁹⁶ John MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1979, p. 90.

⁹⁷ Cf. "The Preventive System", *Constitutions*, pp. 247-248.

1. When you have to correct someone in particular, never do so in the presence of others.
2. When you give advice or counsel, always try to send the person away satisfied and still friendly to you.
3. Always thank those who admonish you and take their corrections in good part.
4. 'Let your light shine before men, in order that they see your good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven' (Mk. 5,16).⁹⁸

The last two suggestions were a gentle reminder of the importance of humility and integrity: it is reasonable and fair that all those who have the task of disciplining others must not lose sight of their own limitations and their duty to lead by personal example.

2.6. A vast supportive network

In the earliest accounts of the oratorian experience, "Don Bosco does not present the work of the Oratory as a *Salesian* project, managed exclusively by members of a *religious* congregation, but simply as a work for youth, carried forward by priests and laity of the city of Turin [...] supported by ecclesiastical and civil authority, by private businesses or individuals, men and women, all those who were concerned about the welfare of young people".⁹⁹ These writings reveal the amazing broadmindedness of his educational approach, a fact confirmed by Giuseppe Bracco, who, after studying the quality of Don Bosco's social interaction, states: "Don Bosco was never alone".¹⁰⁰ His network of supporters and benefactors was as wide as it was person-to-person.

Bracco also notes that Don Bosco respected government authority. From building a simple wall to constructing the grandiose Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians, "there is no fundamental action, no decision that Don Bosco

⁹⁸ *BM*, vol. 11, p. 7.

⁹⁹ I am referring to the "Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales" and the "Cenni satirici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales" probably written in 1854 and 1862 respectively. PRELLEZO, *Sistema educativo*, p. 15 (trans. mine).

¹⁰⁰ GIUSEPPE BRACCO, "Don Bosco and Civil Society" in EGAN and MIDALI (Eds), *Don Bosco's Place in History*, p. 241.

did not submit to the approval of the city authorities.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, “as a practical means of furthering his work within the civil community, Don Bosco used a tool which was also an educative, pedagogical method”.¹⁰² He would begin every major project with a positive attitude and a steely determination to involve the greatest number of people of good will. A case in point is the lottery. When Don Bosco launched a lottery, he tested his idea by sharing it with his close collaborators. He then began involving people on a huge scale in setting up the steering committee, in collecting prizes, in selling tickets, in rallying supporters and inviting sponsors.¹⁰³

Even when dealing with individual boys who needed to be admitted to the Oratory or to be inserted back into society after their training, Don Bosco relied on a massive network of loyal supporters. His idea was to create a vast family of persons at the service of the Church and the Salesian mission to poor and abandoned youth. This is why he founded the Salesian Society, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesians Co-operators and the Association of the Clients of Mary Help of Christians. The boys, on their part, grew in an environment of encouragement that extended far beyond the Valdocco walls. It made them feel loved and accepted even when they left its precincts. Eco, acknowledges this all-embracing vision when he calls Don Bosco “a shrewd reformer who invented a new world of staying together [...], a project that invested all of Italian society of the industrial era”.¹⁰⁴

3. The means to foster expressivity in Don Bosco's pedagogy

The many techniques that contributed to the gradual process of maturity in young people were as important as the preconditions necessary to strengthen it. We will mention only ten.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* Don Bosco's letter to Michele di Cavour in 1846 placed 'respect for authority' on a par with three other fundamental principles: love of work, frequentation of the Holy Sacraments, and avoidance of evil companions.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁴ Umberto Eco, *L'Espresso*, 15-11-1981.

3.1. Expression through play

If rapport was an essential precondition for expressive education, the playground was the most efficacious place to initiate it. With its opportunities for games, gymnastics and sports, the playground was as necessary as the classroom, because effective cognitive learning presupposed a confident and trusting relationship, "to like them in the things that they liked".¹⁰⁵ The educator's participation in the games of the pupils was an excellent means of diffusing tension and effacing the need for punishments.

The numerous studies in educational psychology today can vouch for the salutary effects this approach has on child development. Play sublimates aggression by producing interdependence, team spirit, generosity and respect for rules.¹⁰⁶ Don Bosco celebrated the expansive nature of games and the energy they stimulated in youngsters. Sedentary games were discouraged at the Oratory. Seats or benches on the playgrounds of his institutes were forbidden "because they don't correspond with a boy's need for movement and letting off steam".¹⁰⁷ One of his favourite sayings was, "Be happy!" It was often an invitation to join in the games.¹⁰⁸

Don Bosco also liked to accompany his boys through the verdant hills and fresh air of Monferrato. Excursions and picnics on foot inculcated a sense of wonder at the beauty of nature. The long walks provided essential exercise to invigorate their youthful bodies.¹⁰⁹ Noise too, was an inevitable part of such a free and friendly atmosphere. It was a natural expression of spontaneity desirable to his ears. Thanks to this climate of total acceptance of youngsters, certain forms of self-discipline that were included in the time-table were accepted willingly.

Morrison believes that "[t]he attainment of self-discipline was possible because noise was accepted as a legitimate and important part of expres-

¹⁰⁵ 'Letter from Rome', *Constitutions*, p. 259.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. G. DACQUINO, *Psicologia di Don Bosco*, Turin: SEI, 1988, p. 151.

¹⁰⁷ P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, II, Colle Don Bosco (Asti): LDC, 1952, p. 49, cited in Silvio TRAMONTIN, "Don Bosco and the World of Work", in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, Rome: LAS, 1993, pp. 259-260.

¹⁰⁸ Morand WIRTH, *Don Bosco et les Salesiens. Cent Cinquante Ans d'Histoire*, Torino: Elle Di Ci, 1969, p. 93.

¹⁰⁹ MB, vol. 12, p. 343.

sion of self".¹¹⁰

Casotti calls Don Bosco's method "an intelligent Christian Froebelism applied not only to the period of infancy, but also to childhood, to adolescence, to young adulthood".¹¹¹

3.2. Expression through Music

Don Bosco believed in the power of music to safeguard idleness and immorality,¹¹² and to educate to culture and self-expression.¹¹³ He made the love and study of music a permanent and distinctive feature of all his schools, a *conditio sine qua non* for the all-round development of young people.¹¹⁴ Over the doorway leading into the music hall he inscribed the slogan, "Forbid not music".¹¹⁵ A journalist writing in Turin's *L'Armonia* was so impressed by the enthusiasm and quality of singing of the choir that he lamented "It is unfortunate that this aspect of educating the young is not more known and practised".¹¹⁶

The artisans and working youth at the Oratory were offered the exclusive opportunity to learn instrumental music. They were better equipped to physically manage the heavy instruments or to perform the energetic blowing exercises. Don Bosco also wanted them to develop the sensitive side of their personalities,¹¹⁷ while at the same time, giving them a sense of

¹¹⁰ MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 68.

¹¹¹ Fredrick Froebel, was the father of the 'Kindergarten' who encouraged play as an expression of the essential organic relatedness of children to nature. CASOTTI, "Don Bosco e la pedagogia del suo tempo" in *Giovanni Bosco: Il Metodo Preventivo con testimonianze e altri scritti educativi inediti*, Brescia: La Scuola, (7^a Ed.): <http://www.pregchiereagesuemaria.it/libri/don%20bosco%20e%20la%20pedagogia%20del%20suo%20tempo.htm>.

¹¹² Music at the Oratory was an incentive to maintaining high standards of morality. When this failed Don Bosco was even prepared to stop it and expel the offenders, as it happened in 1875. Cf. BARBERIS, 23-1-1876, Notebook IV, 27, FDBM, 837 B11, in LENTI, "Saint with a Human Face", *JSS*, 8:2 fall 1997, p. 196.

¹¹³ *MO*, [III, 10] Chapter 49.

¹¹⁴ *BM*, vol. III, p. 101.

¹¹⁵ It was inscribed in Latin: *Ne impediās musicam*. Cf. WIRTH, *Don Bosco et les Salesiens*, p. 96.

¹¹⁶ *L'Armonia*, 8-6-1854, cited in *BM*, vol 5, p. 304.

¹¹⁷ BARBERIS, *Appunti*, 197/4, cited by Rik BIESMANS, "Aesthetics in Don Bosco's Educational System (1876-1884)", in *JSS*, 10:1 spring 1999, pp. 145-168.

importance in the life of the Oratory – a point worth noting especially in a context where students for academic courses were considered superior to those involved in technical studies. The great attachment and gratitude that these past pupils of the workshops had towards Don Bosco are faithfully recorded by Giulio Barberis in his diary.¹¹⁸

Eugenio Ceria sums it up when he says that the principle reason why Don Bosco esteemed music so highly “has to be sought in the impact on the hearts and the imagination of the boys he ascribed to it. He intended to refine them, to educate them and to make them better”.¹¹⁹

3.3. Expression through Theatre

Doing theatre at the Oratory was another way to develop a holistic education of street-children and young workers. It helped to cultivate self-expression and group-expression at one stroke. It gave many the confidence to appear in public – a skill that would be a boon to potential leaders in social and ecclesiastical circles.¹²⁰

Don Bosco enjoyed writing plays because they encouraged the enthusiastic participation of youngsters. His pieces combined entertainment with education and moral instruction.¹²¹ A notable example is the hilarious three-act comedy entitled, *The Metric System*. “Through the staged antics and buffoonery, [the audience was] unaware that they were being indoctrinated into practical values of the new metric system.”¹²²

While educating through theatre, he considered the guiding presence of the educator as all important. The purely aesthetic exercise did not make much sense, in fact, he considered it deleterious.¹²³ The high value he gave to the educational and moral power of theatre can be seen in his keen per-

¹¹⁸ LENTI, “Saint with a Human Face”, *JSS*, 8:2 fall 1997, p. 174.

¹¹⁹ Eugenio CERIA, *Annali*, 691/1 in BIESMANS, “Aesthetics”, in *JSS*, 10:1 spring 1999, p. 160 (italics mine).

¹²⁰ A detailed study of Don Bosco and the theatre may be found in Marco BONGIOANNI, *Comunicatore Educatore*, vols. 1 & 2 (Collana dB88), Roma: Editrice SDB, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1989.

¹²¹ BIESMANS, “Aesthetics”, in *JSS*, 10:1 spring 1999, p. 160.

¹²² Michael RIBOTTA, “Don Bosco’s battle against illiteracy”, *JSS*, 1:1, spring 1990, p. 8.

¹²³ Michele NOVELLI, “La Casa della Fortuna” in *Il Bollettino Salesiano*, July/August 2009, pp. 23-26.

sonal follow-up after he could no longer direct it himself.¹²⁴ Later, to clarify its aims in his educational system and to consolidate its implementation, he wrote the *Regulations for the Theatre*, in which he insisted on the appointment of a ‘Capo del Teatrino’ to take full responsibility for the production from start to finish.¹²⁵

Sociologist and theatre educator, Michele Novelli, believes that Don Bosco’s choice for a morally educative theatre did not imply being moralistic. His preoccupation was like that of a ‘connoisseur of youth psychology’: either the theatre is educative and morally constructive, or it runs the risks of doing grave harm to young impressionable minds.¹²⁶

3.4. Expression through Literacy

In 1844, the city of Turin’s first evening school was started by the young Bosco, far away from the glare of the city and without fanfare. He offered basic literacy courses to poor children and struggling apprentices who lived in small rented rooms, “who hungered for any kind of schooling they could get – something which their long days in shop or factory made it impossible for them to attain.”¹²⁷ Soon their numbers increased. Many came on weekends. Don Bosco had to shift twice to bigger, more open spaces suitable for better instruction. His biographer, Giovanni Battista Lemoyne adds that without Don Bosco’s classes “they would [...] have remained illiterate and deprived of even the most elementary kind of education!”¹²⁸

Eager to empower them for a self-reliant future, Don Bosco looked far ahead to see how socio-political changes offered young people opportunities for growth. For instance, he urged them to learn Italian, foreseeing that

¹²⁴ See how Don Bosco changed the directors of the theatre when he was dissatisfied with the way it was being organised: “Chronicles of Barberis”, C.I., pp. 42-44; mentioned also in *MB*, vol 13, pp. 30-31.

¹²⁵ The first General Chapter even held provincials responsible for the quality of plays written and performed. Cf. BIESMANS, “Aesthetics”, in *JSS*, 10:1 spring 1999, p. 161. The *Regulations* experienced modifications in three further editions.

¹²⁶ Michele NOVELLI, “Il teatro educativo ha bisogno di un educatore”, *Il Bollettino Salesiano*, Sept. 2008, also in: <http://www.donbosconews.it/TES/BS/index.htm>. (24-7-2009).

¹²⁷ RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 1:1, pp. 1-15.

¹²⁸ Cited by Michael RIBOTTA, “Training Boys to Earn a Living: The Beginnings of Vocational Education at the Oratory”, *JSS*, 4:1, spring 1993, pp. 62-63.

it would soon be the language of a united Italy.¹²⁹ He also introduced the metric system in his evening classes with a sense of urgency, aware that it would replace the traditional system of measurements.¹³⁰

He also fostered poetry appreciation. He would encourage them to write and recite poems suitable for special Oratory celebrations. Lemoyne testifies: "[T]hese events aroused and inspired budding poets. We still have hundreds of poems which we gathered as cherished souvenirs of happy days – some quite primitive, others truly elegant; through all beats a warm heart".¹³¹ Linking creative writing with a momentous occasion in this way, gave immediacy as well as opportunity for self-expression, so that the love of poetry developed naturally.¹³²

In providing an all-round cultural formation, Don Bosco did not merely teach, but went a step further. Aware of the lack of books suitable for students he decided to produce them himself. The result was three easy-to-read textbooks for juvenile readers in three consecutive years: *Church History* (1845), *Learning Arithmetic with the Metric System* (1846) and *Bible History* (1847). Turin's newspaper, *L'Armonia*, commended his genius for rendering such vast, diverse and complex themes available to youngsters in a clear, morally edifying and attractive style.¹³³

3.5. Democratic expression

Morrison's detailed study of the educational philosophy of Don Bosco attests that by 1854, many of the methods employed at the Oratory reflected those of a democracy. The prize-winners for outstanding behaviour

¹²⁹ The Italian Peninsula was a conglomeration of city-states during the medieval and Renaissance period. It was eventually liberated and unified amidst much struggle in the 19th and 20th centuries. Don Bosco experienced for the major part of his life the impact of the reunification process called the *Risorgimento* between 1815 to 1871.

¹³⁰ RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 1:1, pp. 7-8.

¹³¹ *BM*, vol 6, p. 129.

¹³² MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 73. Don Bosco, was ahead of his time. Poetry as a capacity-building and therapeutic tool began to grow in acceptance in the second half of the twentieth century. Cf. <http://www.poetrytherapy.org/articles/pt.htm> (27-7-2009).

¹³³ RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 1:1, pp. 4-7.

were selected by secret ballot, by the students themselves.¹³⁴ Each school year began with a reading of the duties and regulations for teachers and pupils at an assembly where both staff and students were present. The pedagogical process was to be a reciprocal responsibility.¹³⁵

Some staff members raised objections. James Ruffino, who lived at the Oratory and observed Don Bosco at close quarters, testifies:

The boys were given all the freedom compatible – with discipline and good conduct. When the bell summoned them to school, they were not required to line up; in the hot season they could remove coats and ties in the study hall. Assistants often reminded Don Bosco that order and decorum demanded otherwise, but he was loath to yield to this, so anxious was he to avoid all regimentations.¹³⁶

Teaching was to be dialogical and participatory both in and outside the classroom.¹³⁷ It was the only way teachers could get to know the students' needs and the best way students could open up to spontaneous self-expression. Don Bosco considered the art of questioning essential to good education. "Question, question, question over and over again. The more the pupil is made to talk the more will he profit from his schooling."¹³⁸ "Quiz [your students] very often, ask them to explain and read, read and explain. [...] Encourage them at all times, never humiliate them; praise them as often as you can and do not belittle them".¹³⁹ With this daring approach to fostering intellectual curiosity, it is hardly surprising that "his boys' habit of questioning was regarded with suspicion; they were well-known for their repeated questioning".¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ *BM*, vol. 5, pp. 9-10, in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 65.

¹³⁵ *BM*, vol. 6, p. 451, in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 65.

¹³⁶ *BM*, vol. 6, pp. 338-339, cited in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 65.

¹³⁷ MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 62.

¹³⁸ *BM*, vol. 11, p. 200, cited in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 62.

¹³⁹ This is a part of Don Bosco's advice to a dissatisfied philosophy lecturer, named Bertollo, whose students had not come up to his expectations. *BM*, vol. 11, pp. 270-271, cited in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ Fr. Ghiringhello, a priest from Turin once called in on Don Bosco with the plea "that his boys give him – and his fellow theologians – a respite because they were exhausted by the continual bombardment of questions fired at them by the young members of the

Training in social concern was another area of Don Bosco's education for democratic citizenship. When the cholera epidemic broke out in Turin in 1854, fear had gripped the populace. Relatives had left their elderly kin in search of safety; even doctors fled the city. But Don Bosco, emboldened by faith, rose to the occasion. He solicited volunteers from among his older boys to help combat the contagion. About forty-four of them spent weeks caring for the sick and infirm. They divided their responsibilities according to groups that catered to medical first-aid, care of the sick in private homes, searching for victims, and emergency purposes. As soon as word of their extraordinary generosity spread, the demand for their services soared until it was impossible to cater to the needs of all.¹⁴¹ Creative social commitment enabled Don Bosco to look at all things, persons and events as opportunities for an education to holistic maturity.

3.6. Expression through leadership

Closely associated with and yet distinct from democratic education was Don Bosco's promotion of leadership training. He often delegated authority among the more capable boys of the Oratory. His sharing of responsibility would make them feel recognized and would stimulate in them a healthy self-esteem.¹⁴² The organization of Sodalities was a very productive way of forming leaders in good Christian living and honest citizenship.

Perhaps, the most significant example of Don Bosco's training for leadership can be seen in his innovative education project. Due to the lack of support from aristocrats of Piedmont, the teaching profession was poorly remunerated.¹⁴³ This led to a great scarcity of teachers. Where was Don Bosco to find teachers for the growing numbers at the Oratory? Lemoyne's answer is enlightening:

Oratory." *BM*, vol. 3, p. 88, in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 79.

¹⁴¹ *BM*, vol. 5, pp. 55-56 in MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, pp. 129-130.

¹⁴² *BM*, vol. 3, pp. 306-310. In 1848, for example, he delegated Joseph Brosio, an ex-serviceman to form a cadet unit at the Oratory, and organize gymnastic displays involving military tactics and manoeuvres, which were very popular with the boys.

¹⁴³ RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 1:1, p. 10. The renowned economist, Carlo Cattaneo, warned a friend who was considering a teaching post: "I advise you to seek some way to supplement your income as a teacher if you expect to live in any kind of dignified fashion".

He made them. And this is how he did it. Several of the older boys attending the oratory were very intelligent and desired a better education so that they could obtain more advantageous employment. Don Bosco, therefore, picked out several of them, and at suitable hours gave them, gratis, instruction in Italian, Latin, French, arithmetic, and other subjects in return for their teaching their companions catechism during Lent. They also taught other subjects at the evening classes, both weekdays and Sundays.¹⁴⁴

Not all these leaders turned out to be good teachers. Some did not keep their word. But gradually others joined and their numbers increased. Later they began to assume influential roles in society. Some became excellent priests.¹⁴⁵

3.7. Expression through cooperation

Group work formed an important part of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Boys gathered after lunch to work together during catechism sessions. Morrison states:

Bosconian pedagogy is imbued with a spirit of enquiry fostered through group work, pupil-participation and interaction, involving the same two-way educational process in which the pupil knows that he is loved by the teacher who, in turn enjoys the educand's trust and confidence.¹⁴⁶

His use of peer-to-peer assistance is well documented in his biography of Michele Magone – an unruly teenager who had lost his father and about whom his parish priest wrote: «when he's away all is peaceful and when he leaves all breathe a sigh of relief!»¹⁴⁷ Don Bosco describes the strategy that won him over to a more focused lifestyle.

First of all he was assigned a companion who acted as his 'Guardian Angel' to help him, advise him and to correct him if necessary. Without Magone realising it, this lad, in the most practical and charitable way, never let him out of his sight. He

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, p. 209.

¹⁴⁷ JOHN BOSCO, *Biographical sketch of Michele Magone, young pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, (3rd Edition) Turin: Tipografia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, 1866.

was in the same class and study as well as in recreation. He played and joked with him. But whenever the need arose he said: Don't speak that way because it's not right, don't say that word or call upon the name of the Lord in vain. And, for his part, even though he showed his impatience from time to time, Michele responded: "Good, you did the right thing to warn me; you are a good friend to have. If in the past I had had such a friend I would not have formed these bad habits which I now find so hard to break".¹⁴⁸

Fontana, is all praise for Don Bosco's use of the basic principles of 'Cooperative Learning' long before the term was even coined or formulated scientifically.¹⁴⁹ The first two principles are: "[a.] The cooperation among companions within a group benefit learning, and the dynamics of the group help growth. [b.] A positive interdependence is established in groups between members in as much as each is concerned and feels responsible not only for his own work but also for that of the others."¹⁵⁰ Through co-operation and affection a motivating transformation facilitates growth and the proposal is accepted willingly: become great, become good, become yourself, become someone and make your life truly meaningful.¹⁵¹

3.8. Expression through personal counselling

Visitors to the Oratory were often struck by the way boys could shift from a noisy game on the playground to the strict silence required for prayer or study. One of the secrets of this phenomenal self-control by youngsters, was Don Bosco's 'word-in-the-ear' technique. It was his way of making contact with each student by calling each one by name or bending down to speak eye-to-eye if needed. He used this intimate method for encouraging or correcting mainly during recreation. "It was father to son: it was personal and confidential. Above all, [it] was to be empathetic."¹⁵²

As a priest-educator, Don Bosco also made ample use of confession for

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter II.

¹⁴⁹ 'Cooperative learning' as an educational theory began in the early 1900s. Cf. D. JOHNSON, R. JOHNSON, and E. HOLUBEC, *Cooperation in the classroom*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ FONTANA, *Relazione, segreto di ogni educazione*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁵² MORRISON, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, pp. 142-143.

a truly helping relationship with his students. It was therapeutically advantageous for their interior maturation. It blended the benefits of spiritual and moral wisdom with psychological insight in a climate of trust and cooperation. Fontana presents the case of Michele Magone as an example. After a month at the Oratory, Michele became sad and despondent. He tried to avoid his friendly companion who encouraged him to make his confession. Don Bosco's 'word-in-the-ear' with the boy reveals the depth of wisdom and warmth of rapport between priest-educator and student:

I was keeping a close watch on [Michele] so one day I called him and the following conversation took place.

"My dear Magone, I want you to do me a favour and I will not take 'no' for an answer."

"What is it? I am ready to do anything you ask."

"I want you to give me your heart for a while and tell me what is causing you to be so sad these days."

"It's true – I have been sad . . . but I am desperate and I don't know what to do." Having said this he broke down crying. *I let him cry for a little while* then, jokingly, I said:

"Come on now! Are you the same 'General Micky', the leader of the Carmagnola gang? What a fine general you are! You are not even able to tell me, in a few words, what is weighing on your soul."

"I'd like to but I don't know how to begin - I don't know how to express myself."

"*Just say one word and I'll say the rest.*"

"I have a mixed-up conscience."

"That's enough - I understand everything. You had only to say that for me to say the rest. I don't want to enter into matters of conscience just for the moment. I'll just tell you what to do to put everything right. So listen: [...]."¹⁵³

Thanks to the advice that followed, Magone made his confession (to another priest) that very day. The result was tremendous joy. From a confused street-urchin who did not know how to handle the naughtiness of his past, Magone was transformed into the heart and soul of the Oratory and a model of happiness for his companions. But even here, Don Bosco shows himself to be a master of youth spiritual-psychology and saves the boy from the trap of pietism.

¹⁵³ BOSCO, *Biographical sketch of Michele Magone*, Chapter III (italics mine).

He began to frequent the sacraments of Confession and Communion and began to find great joy in those practices of piety he previously found boring. He also found confession so pleasing that I had to ask him to go less frequently lest he become *a victim of scruples*. This is a real danger to young people when they make up their minds to serve the Lord with all their hearts. This wreaks great havoc since the devil uses this means to disturb the mind and the heart and so make the practice of religion burdensome. It often causes those who have already made great strides in virtue to retrace their steps.¹⁵⁴

3.9. Expression through child rights

The fact that Don Bosco chose to educate poor and abandoned youngsters was a bold step in the promotion of human rights among the poorest and the weakest. Ribotta notes that primary schooling in Piedmont was scarce at the time when he began his evening literacy classes. The scarcity was politically motivated: the aristocracy sought to restrict education to their own class, to maintain their abundant privileges and to avoid a revolution caused by a more enlightened population.¹⁵⁵

Lemoyne, observes that most of the boys who frequented Don Bosco's evening classes were poor, hard-working young apprentices who were available for any job, some as small as twelve. They lived from hand to mouth. Survival, not education, was their primary concern. Consequently, maltreatment of these helpless child-labourers by unscrupulous employers was common.¹⁵⁶

Don Bosco's zeal for saving young people from danger motivated him to infiltrate even these sweatshops and construction sites. As always, he would first prepare the ground by establishing a relationship with the young workers. He would draw them into conversation and begin a lasting friendship. His poignant remark gives us an indication of their profound loneliness: "I was probably the only one who really cared about them."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter IV (italics mine).

¹⁵⁵ This attitude was typified by the remark of Carlo Felice, King of Piedmont, who admitted that "he trusted no one, except those who knew neither how to read nor how to write." Cf. footnote no. 3, in *LF, JSS*, 4:1, p. 62.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 4:1, p. 62.

¹⁵⁷ RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 4:1, p. 73.

On listening to their stories of oppression, he felt compelled to draw up ‘work contracts’ with their bosses, through which he took up the responsibility of being their protector and guarantor in the place of their parents. He got the latter to agree to pay a fair wage. He won for the apprentices a holiday on Sundays and holy days and an annual bonus through the “customary two-week vacation every year.”¹⁵⁸ None of the contracts of this period were so pro-employee. One wonders what means of persuasion Don Bosco used to convince the employers to agree to such liberal terms.¹⁵⁹

3.10. Expression through self-reliance

In his *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco notes: “As a rule, the oratory boys included stonecutters, bricklayers, street pavers, plasterers [...]. They were not church goers and most of them had no friends.”¹⁶⁰ Easily susceptible to exploitation and abuse, some of them were even recruited by the increasing number of street gangs into a life of crime. Something had to be done to ensure a stable livelihood and to help them unite to promote their own economic, moral and psycho-spiritual development. Again Don Bosco showed creative initiative. He started a ‘Mutual Aid Society’ – the first of its kind for working boys.¹⁶¹ One of its chief aims was to provide assistance for those members who were in need during illness or unemployment. It met with instant success. He improved upon the model and even added Turin’s outstanding citizens as honorary members and as examples for decent living.¹⁶²

There was much more to be done to build self-determination and resilience in his boys, not just economically, but morally and spiritually as well. The blasphemy and foul language they were exposed to at their workplaces led him to consider another daring alternative.¹⁶³ He decided to create his

¹⁵⁸ RIBOTTA declares that several of these documents are among the first such contracts drawn up in Turin between apprentices and masters. Cf. *JSS*, 4:1, p. 76.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁶¹ The Mutual Aid Society was founded on 1 July 1850. Cf. ‘Regulations of the Mutual Aid society’, art. 1, in *MB*, vol. 4, pp. 75-77.

¹⁶² RIBOTTA, *JSS*, 4:1, pp. 66-67.

¹⁶³ Pietro Enria’s testimony is worth citing: «In those workshops in the city one heard the worst kind of talk [...] many times I had to run out of the workshop in order not to

own workshops at Valdocco. In 1853 he began with two cobbler shops. Next, he offered tailoring, and then bookbinding. In all these initiatives he was the principal instructor. Eight years later, he reached a highpoint in the development of the shop programme with the introduction of his first printing press. The quantity, quality and range of its services would improve over the years to the point of receiving awards and trophies of appreciation.

Towards the last years of his life, a liberal periodical, *La Stella d'Italia*, published this first-hand report:

The Valdocco institute. What a charming place. More than a thousand people live there and grow in their work, in family, in themselves [...] Here you find a metal workshop, there a woodwork shop. Here again there's a fabulous printery, while over there there's a foundry. On the right a well endowed, well-positioned bookshop, on the left a shoemaker's workshop, another for tailors and yet another still for book binders. Everywhere there's a happy, trusting kind of quiet; everywhere a wonderful order, spontaneous, I'd say, since in that place you find more of feeling than you do the power of duty and discipline. And, something that's everything for an institute like this – everywhere and in everything a calm, peaceful atmosphere, one of well-being and health that cheers you up and makes you happy.¹⁶⁴

Don Bosco was eighty years old. Reading the report must have made him feel young again.

Some advantages of the new discourse

We seem to think in the language we speak. If then our discourse accommodates new metaphors it is likely that the way we perceive reality will also be refreshingly new. The above presentation has been an attempt to propose just such a change in perspective on Salesian pedagogy for our

listen to obscene talk. I was only 14 years only, but some of the workers were grown men. Two of them were particularly evil. [...] They were like animals». Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, Roma: LAS, 1980, p. 250.

¹⁶⁴ *La Stella d'Italia*, 13-11-1885, ed. In MB, vol. 17, p. 513, cited in Francesco MOTTO, *Un sistema educativo sempre attuale*, Torino: Elledici, 2000, p. 19.

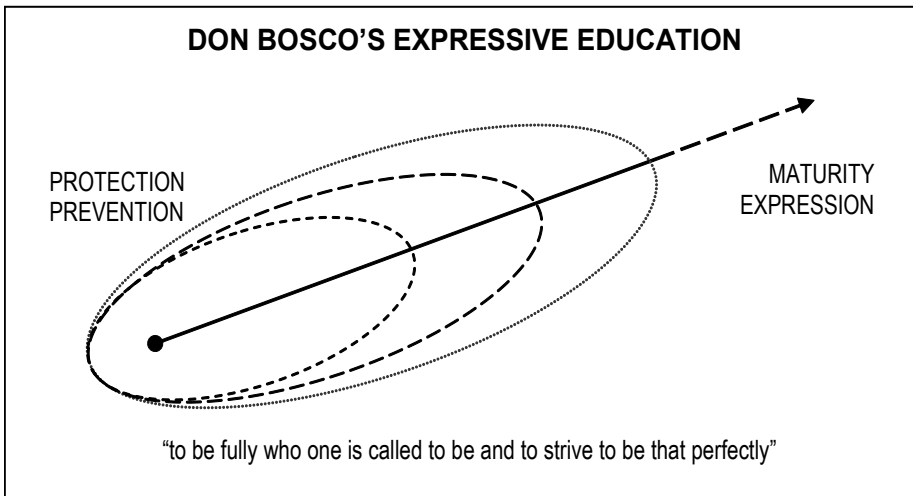
times. Some metaphors of growth that recur throughout the discourse on Don Bosco's pedagogical praxis are: 'life', 'maturity', 'cultivate', 'motivate', 'enhance', 'encourage', 'develop', 'healthy', 'holistic', 'environment', 'ecology', 'creative', 'spontaneous', 'self-reliance', 'joy', 'freedom', 'leadership', 'cooperation', 'resiliency' and so on. While they contrast with the traditional metaphors of 'protection', 'prevention', 'nurturing', 'saving' – they *include and transcend* them, because protection is an integral part of the process of development towards maturity.

Reframing the Salesian educational discourse in the above manner helps to put Don Bosco's *preventive system in perspective*. The repressive system, however well-intentioned, was a flawed, adult approach to resolving juvenile delinquency. Prevention was a better alternative because it was a humane answer to a human problem. Yet, conceptually, we know that prevention is not the antonym of repression. Expression is. In this article we have understood expressive education to mean growth towards holistic maturity. It excludes all forms of repression, but does not exclude prevention, because, in Don Bosco's understanding, protection from hindrances to growth is a safeguard that makes expression realisable. A preventive education that rejects the use of repressive methods while tending to a full and free expression of the educand is, undoubtedly, Don Bosco's choice.

However, to define or identify something in terms of negative categories is not standard semantic procedure. Heuristically, as an exercise in clarity, we sometimes do approach the definition of a thing by first stating what it is not. But on defining it we indicate its essential nature, its connotative characteristics, the necessary and sufficient conditions for which it is a member of a specific species, the positive categories that make it objectively identifiable.¹⁶⁵ In referring to Don Bosco's educational method as a 'preventive system', we focus on risk-factors and devise strategies for protective action. The 'preventive' discourse is essentially problem-related. If, on the contrary, we refer to it as an 'expressive system', we are identifying

¹⁶⁵ The criteria listed are a summary of my reflections based on the following readings: Cf. Norman SWARTZ, "Definitions, Dictionaries, and Meanings", 1997, <http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/swartz/definitions.htm> (24-7-2009); Sam VAKNIN, "The Definition of Definitions", <http://samvak.tripod.com/define.html> (30-7-2009); María CEREZO, "On Naming and Possibility in Kripke and in the Tractatus", <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Lang/LangCere.htm> (20-7-2009).

an intrinsic goal that is the purpose of every human being. We are focusing on the fundamental right of every person to maturity. We are identifying the aim by which education is specifically and positively qualified. The new discourse fosters protection and prevention, but it does so by *building resiliency* through life-encouraging strategies for all-round fulfilment. The problem-solving approach of preventive education is subsumed into the overarching thrust towards 'being the best one can be'. Don Bosco's expressive education is the opposite of repression which it excludes, but far richer and more complex than the preventive education which it includes, subsumes and transcends.



Moreover, an 'expressive education' perspective has the advantage of *being with the times*. Contemporary psychology is capable of throwing into sharp relief Don Bosco's pedagogical insights like never before. Since the 1950s, several humanistic psychologists have developed theories and practices that involve human happiness. Their extensive research has contributed to what has come to be known as 'positive psychology'.

Positive psychologists study the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.¹⁶⁶ They seek to nurture talent and ful-

¹⁶⁶ Cf. William COMPTON, *An Introduction to Positive Psychology*, Wadsworth Publishing, 2005, pp. 1-22.

filment, over merely treating mental illness.¹⁶⁷ This paradigm shift from a disease-centred psycho-analysis to a client-centred facilitation for self-actualisation is crucial to our option for metaphors of growth over and above metaphors of prevention. Don Bosco's empathetic views on juvenile delinquents¹⁶⁸ predate the positive psychologists' perception of human beings as basically good, although having the potential for aggressive antisocial behaviour which is often provoked by threats that frustrate basic needs.¹⁶⁹ Just as a seed grows and becomes the potential for the plant to mature, so does an individual grow, given the potential to develop his or her capacities constructively.¹⁷⁰ Positive psychologists see the task of education as oriented towards the facilitation of maturity, defined as a type of behaviour that is congruent,¹⁷¹ where a person's inner and outer selves are in harmony. Education is therefore far more than mere teaching skills, curricular planning, or using audiovisual techniques. The real "facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain *attitudinal qualities* which exist in the *personal relationship* between the facilitator and the learners".¹⁷²

Finally, by reframing the discourse in metaphors of growth we also have a strong *communication advantage*. When we communicate, we convey who we are, who we think we are and how we wish to be known. Communication is intimately linked to *identity* and *performance*.¹⁷³ If we wish to communicate the pedagogy of Don Bosco beyond Salesian circles today, we cannot ignore this basic fact. We cannot introduce the core pedagogical values for our times in the same metaphors that Don Bosco used for his. For instance, to introduce professional educators to Don Bosco's expressive way in the language of prevention is to invite a communication disaster. From the moment we utter the words 'preventive system', it is likely that our audience

¹⁶⁷ Cf. C. H. PATTERSON, *Foundations for a Theory of Instruction and Educational Psychology*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 324-325.

¹⁶⁸ Don Bosco began his festive Oratory as a response to a fundamental need that many juvenile delinquents who filled Turin's jails had sorely lacked.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. PATTERSON, *Foundations for a Theory*, p. 286.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁷² Carl ROGERS, *Freedom to Learn*, Ohio: Merrill, 1969, pp. 105-106 (italics mine).

¹⁷³ These social-interaction implications that affect education may be drawn from an attentive reading of the seminal work of Erving GOFFMAN, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life*, New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

has conjured up images of overprotective parents confronting children with a lists of do's and don'ts, or benign physicians administering prophylactic medicines to forestall the flu. By the time we begin to eulogize the positive expressive elements of Don Bosco's pedagogy, our words will have fallen on deaf ears because, by then, our listeners will probably have their mental blocks firmly in place. To tag the word 'preventive' to an abundantly expressive educational experience is a 'reductionism'¹⁷⁴ we cannot afford – certainly not today, in a world congested with metaphors that vie with each other in the scramble for public attention.

On the contrary, if we speak up for a new, goal-directed, 'expressive education', we are likely to provoke interest and enthusiasm in our listeners. We will seek their cooperation in building the conditions and in using the means to make all young people safe, cared for and holistically healthy. We will become protagonists and promoters of multidisciplinary studies and research on a wide range of themes that will promote Don Bosco's expressive education in different corners of our globe.¹⁷⁵ We will build life-

¹⁷⁴ Others would say 'restrictive' where 'preventive' is understood merely as the forestalling of and protection from harm. Cf. CIAN, *Il 'Sistema Preventivo'*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁵ Randomly speaking, some multi-disciplinary themes urgently seeking scientific research in the furtherance of Don Bosco's Expressive Way in diverse contexts and cultures are as follows: Educational studies on the impact of the expressive method, best practice paradigms, cooperative learning, training in juvenile leadership, education to love and responsibility, non-violence education, child rights promotion, building ecological awareness, creativity education; Communication studies on the impact of new media on youth development, juvenile verbal and nonverbal languages, mass media literacy, innovative use of media in education, studies on juvenile mediatic cultures, techniques in juvenile communication for communion and liberation; Psychological studies on expressive education or juvenile counselling, or the therapeutic merits of art, music, theatre, sports, laughter, entertainment, self-expression, peer-support, ecology in the re-construction of a young person's identity, especially those who are disadvantaged or stigmatised; Religious studies on the essentials of youth spirituality, the interconnections between happiness and holiness, the implications for holistic growth, the nexus between youth spirituality and psychology, the phenomenon of juvenile voluntarism in the service of a better world, redefinition of the stages of youthful expressive maturation; Sociological studies on juvenile career guidance, democratic citizenship, community engagement, solidarity and youth political participation; Studies on the Ecology of Expressive Education that would include the structure, content, and impact on the maturation of young people. These are some themes of academic importance that could widen and deepen the discourse on Don Bosco's Expressive Education today.

enhancing networks to supply youngsters with opportunities for resilience in an extremely competitive world.

Conclusion

We had said at the start that our search for an ‘expressive’ perspective on the preventive system was born of a desire to be creatively faithful to Don Bosco and to our times. Braido also sees the exercise of adaptation as a legitimate and necessary process of enrichment.

[T]he preventive system, no matter how it was carried out and how it was understood within Christian tradition, is not the ultimate system of education possible; nor is Don Bosco’s preventive system the ultimate possible version of the preventive system itself. The preventive system is not a rich heritage standing apart. It has had remote origins and the first of these origins is the Gospel. The future development of the system, if we are faithful to its principles and its history, will be no less rich in promise and perspective.¹⁷⁶

It is our hope that the Expressive System presented in these pages, holds out that ‘promise and perspective’ for further reflection and debate – the better to enrich our contemporary perception and implementation of Don Bosco’s best gift to humanity.

¹⁷⁶ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, p. 10.