

Part 1: Concretizing the meaning and role of presence in ordinary life

1.1 Introduction

Educating is not an activity you do alongside other activities. It is intertwined in the daily interaction with each other. Presence plays a crucial role in this. That you are there and how you are there as an educator, makes or breaks the whole upbringing event. It was already a basic intuition of Don Bosco. He expected no more from his educators, but neither less than that they shared ordinary life with the boys in all its aspects. Eating, studying, praying, and playing together ... In doing that, the chances of upbringing were enclosed for him. In the discussions with the ecclesiastical authorities about the content of his constitutions, these convictions played a role on the background. He did not want an extended separate prayer life for the salesians. Not because he thought prayer was not important, but because he assumed that they should do that together with the boys. In Rome, where people started from the classical models and did not understand the underlying intuition, this was met with incomprehension. He had the same discussion about the formation of young salesians. He did not want a separate formation house but had his salesians study while they lived among the boys. It met with the same level of misunderstanding and eventually he had to conform to church customs.

However, he never let go of his early convictions. The letters from Rome of 1884 are a good example of this. He reacted to the deterioration of the educational climate in Valdocco and made a warm and explicit plea for the presence of educators in ordinary life. For him, that presence had a preventive and a healing power. A young person with a difficult background who ended up in the oratorio was not confronted with all sorts of requirements but in the first place immersed into ordinary life. The quality of the upbringing climate was therefore crucial for him because it was decisive for the healing development process that the youngster could go through.

Contemporary pedagogical thinkers seem to fit in with what Don Bosco already intuitively felt and emphasized and support the conviction that being present in daily life is at the basis of every upbringing. What's more, they also clarify how sharing ordinary life has a healing power for hurt young people and for young people who end up in specialized youth assistance for various reasons.

One of the most influential pedagogues who developed this vision further and transformed it for caretaking is Wim ter Horst, former professor of pedagogy at the University of Leiden.¹ We base our findings on the belief of Don Bosco in sharing ordinary life and in the presence of the educator interpreted for today's use.

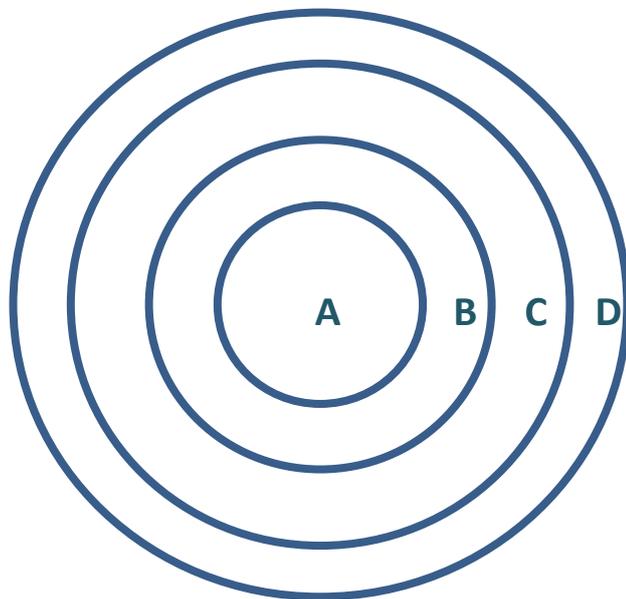
It is good to keep in mind that W. ter Horst developed his vision in the context of youth assistance where professional educators as partners for the parents (temporarily) take over parenting work. His findings, however, can be used without much difficulty in other educational contexts such as teaching and also offer interesting tools for parents.

¹ W. TER HORST, *Het herstel van het gewone leven*, Houten, Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, 2006.

However, the parenting relationship between parents and children is not the starting point here. Not that they do not educate in ordinary life, on the contrary, but it is not the point of view that was used in this study.²

1.2 Who educates?

No one will fight the idea that a child needs education. Who says child, says educator and vice versa (ter Horst p.17). Yet we must always ask ourselves whether a child has 'real' educators. If this child is 'someone's own' or not. Not in the possessive form, but in the sense of solidarity. Who will freely take care of the child, stay awake when it goes wrong and who is happy with this child? Children are from people who love them (p. 17). That love has three important characteristics: (1) It must be free; the child must not earn or pay for it; (2) It is clairvoyant because it sees through the sometimes discouraging exterior the child's hidden treasure within and wants to redeem it; (3) After all, that love is around the child in circles. Around each child there are a number of circles of involvement that must be filled. The A-circle is basically that of the parents and close loved ones where the 'being of each other' is most intimate and intense. The B-circle is less close and includes people one does not want to miss. And so there is another C-circle and D-circle of involved people who play a more or less important role in the child's life.



In specialized youth assistance-work people try to find out who is present in the circles around the child. They work together with the context the child is in, to make sure that the circles are sufficiently filled. The most important thing, however, is that the child can experience that it is in someone's A-circle. Unfortunately, there are children who belong to no one, there is no (more) presence at that most intimate level. There is the challenge for the relief to see what can be repaired (a father in prison is still better than no father at all). Where repairing is no longer possible, it is the question if one can find a substitute (family member, foster help ...). All beautiful words about presence are meaningless if a child is or has nobody. If it does not have real educators. In this sense, we do not have to wonder

² In the world of assistance, the insights of this book are used to provide support in a family with parenting problems to restore normal life and to bring the rearing situation back into balance

that Don Bosco used typical terminology from the family sphere to characterize the parenting relationship. They lived together in a house (not a college) where the educator as a 'father' (mother) or 'brother' (sister) took care of the youngster. This is not a plea to take over the parent role, that would be a pitfall, it is a task to ask whose child it is and whose child it is going to be. If we take our 'salesian' presence for granted, this question will sometimes place us before demanding challenges and difficult choices.

1.3 As an educator, who do you pay attention to from the viewpoint of your presence with the child?

W. ter Horst argues for the restoration of ordinary life. But what does he mean by that? What is the educational presence of the educator focused on? How does it promote the life of and in the child? We explore this on the basis of six questions that every educator has to ask himself. Is this child physically healthy and fit? Does the child feel safe? Can this child feel sufficiently unique? Does this child come out of its shell? Can this child cope with everyday life? Is this child well-situated in time and space?

Is this child healthy and fit?

Sometimes an educator loses sight of this basic question, especially when confronted with difficult or terrible behavior from children. It is, however, the first that can be checked and if necessary adjusted. Does the child sleep enough? Does it have some kind of illness or disease? Do all its senses work well? Does it get sufficient and regular good food and drink? Does the child have enough exercise and can it be out in open air? Is the child clean, fresh and appropriately cared for? Does the child cultivate disease or does it give message through physical complaints? Is the child stigmatized because it is suffering? Parenting starts with this basic care for the child's physical well-being.

Does the child feel safe?

Safety is a crucial condition for learning and growing. In an unsafe climate one cannot take the risk of being too vulnerable in order to try to learn and grow up. So it is a key question in the upbringing to which an answer is not always so easy to give. A number of questions can help estimate how safe a child feels. Is the child threatened or terrorized (even if that is perhaps very subtle and does it look like ordinary teasing from the outside)? Is the child anxious? Are requirements not set too high or too low? Is it not overestimated or underestimated?

Restoring security will usually unblock the development process and release life's energy.

Does this child feel sufficiently unique?

Every person has the need to discern himself among others. A child desires to be someone with a name and an identity, not to be a number but to have something unique and unrepeatable. You can give children a lot of incentives to develop their individuality. Learning something in which it is unique, giving a responsibility that makes it indispensable, reinforcing individuality by asking for it (what do you find, choose, think,

want?), Letting it be part of something, bringing out and giving space to something the child is good at.

Yet we speak of unique enough. Too much uniqueness is threatening. Being too different and deviating from others brings a child in trouble. However, certain forms of individuality (e.g. certain inherent physical characteristics or body defects) cannot be remedied as an educator. You can only teach the child and its environment to deal with it positively.

Does this child come out of its shell?

A child can only develop if it is open and receptive to reality.

Does the child have an interest in the environment, for someone or something, or is it mainly focused on itself?

A child who closes up for the outside world can make it difficult for you as an educator. However, it is important to keep in mind that such a child has not shut down because it is so happy or because it does not need contact with people, animals, plants and things. The challenge is to keep 'knocking on that door'. There is someone home.

How do you approach such a child? By staying friendly, by not letting it down but by trying to continue to get it involved. By searching for the hole in the shield and drilling through it: is there something this child is interested in, something we can use to move on? By being a contagious example as an educator yourself. You have to live yourself to make feel alive! And finally by habituation. Make the child accustomed to taking into account the needs of others and make it realize that it is not the center of the world.

More than to open up the child to the surrounding reality, it must be stimulated to participate actively in that reality. Here too, the assignment remains: continue to knock on that door. Not only for the child to open up but for it to actively come out. The same principles apply: inviting by giving a pleasant example; seizing and reinforcing signals of interest; allowing the child to become accustomed to certain activities in the hope that it learns by experience that this adds value to its life. An additional principle here is to act together first and gradually let go alone. As an educator you need to be a jack of all trades and better have a wide range of skills, techniques, games, etc.

Can the child cope with everyday life? Can it manage the basic forms of ordinary life?

Self-reliance in the field of concrete action is very important for a child. It increases its sense of security and self-esteem and gives it the courage to get out of its shell. These skills the child needs to manage his life, are not simply acquired, they have to be taught.

Children automatically pick up much of those skills in their environment. But it is also necessary to learn skills with the previously mentioned methods of contagious example, doing things together, letting things be done and by habituation. Especially a child coming from a less stimulating environment will need a deliberate training of these basic skills.

Obviously, it is important to be vigilant whether the child is already sufficiently mature to learn certain skills (potty training only makes sense if the child can adequately and consciously control its sphincter muscles). Forcing can otherwise be counter-productive.

Restrictions can also prevent a certain skill from being acquired (a child with a severe visual impairment will not be able to learn to cycle). But even if an educator encounters limits, he always has to search what is still possible within these limits.

W. ter Horst clusters different types of skills in 9 groups. They are part of an integral approach that wants the child to develop in all its dimensions of existence. The groups of skills listed below do not have watertight bulkheads, they merge into one another. But it helps the educator to oversee things and distinguish different life domains.

1. Can the child get along with 'touching' others? We live in our skin and therefore everything that the skin does connects us with reality. This is about knowing how to greet someone (a hand, a kiss) and what can and cannot be done, from holding a baby, up to the respectful discovery of sexuality.
2. Can the child get along with 'care'? Take care of itself, others, plants, things and animals. To learn how to cut its nails or how to wipe dust, etc.
3. Can the child get along with 'playing'? Playing is generous. It's about everything you do, not for the result but just for fun. For children, playing is much more than leisure time. It is a form of life and practice for countless skills. Crafts, making music, playing games together and determining the rules, etc.
4. Can the child get along with 'food and drink'? A child must learn what and how to eat best. Including choosing and buying healthy foods, cooking and table decking, eating the food and learning to taste new things.
5. Can the child get along with 'celebrations and other rituals'? Again in the broadest sense of the word. From celebrating a birthday to learning to say goodbye at a funeral. Sometimes life offers little opportunity for exercise and the child is suddenly confronted with deeply dramatic events. You can help it by creating more rituals and moments of celebration so that it feels safer and has a grip on the key-moments of life that happen to it.
6. Can the child get along with 'leaving home and going out'? Can it go to school by bike, buy a train ticket, visit a museum or church, order a drink, go camping, make a suitcase to leave on holiday ... Do we give children the chance to acquire enough assertiveness and problem solving ability or do we take over from them? What if the bus does not show up?
7. Can the child get along with 'work'? While playing is more about doing, working is about the product and its importance. By working you not only earn a living but you can also realize yourself, preferably in a meaningful way. The child can learn how to plan work and how to divide it into sub-tasks. It must learn to work together. It has to acquire a range of skills that belong to a working attitude: arriving on time, accuracy, being careful, caring for materials, cleaning up ...
8. Can the child get along with 'learning'? This too is a broad concept. It is a series of skills that are necessary for the school career of the child, but it is also about the far-reaching learning capacity. Every development requires learning and learning is a lifelong process. Every phase of life brings new learning challenges. Perhaps most important is the pleasure a child can find in learning and the persistent curiosity and hunger to explore itself, others, the world, or life as a whole.
9. Can the child get along with 'words'? Technically speaking well, knowing what to say when, phoning, writing a letter ... is part of that. But also express feelings, listen empathically, and discuss a difference of opinion. And do you also make the child capable of using today's digital language?

Is this child well-situated in time and space?

Dealing with time is about being able to orientate in time and space and also about being able to handle time concepts such as before and after. But the most important question is how the child stands in time. Can it live with the past, does it face the future, is it actually consciously present in the present?

Dealing with the past

Perhaps a strange question is whether the child has a past. Some children have little (tangible) past. No photos, no objects, no souvenirs, no stories. Experience shows that these children therefore have difficulty to project themselves into the future. No tree without roots. It encourages the educator to document and materialize what is happening now. The question whether you can start to build up that past with the child is also a necessity. Searching for or making photos of where and with whom the child was in its past. Create a collection or scrapbook, etc.

Other children have 'too much' past and struggle with painful, traumatic memories. They too often have difficulty in acquiring a future perspective. Memories, however, are rewritable, one of the remarkable features of our memory. The educator can help a child to speak differently about the past. He can rediscover and rename experiences so that they are brought back to viable dimensions and the child can move on.

Not all experiences, however, lend themselves to this. Children can struggle with serious feelings of guilt or deep wounds and grief. It is important not to bury the past (forgive and forget, no hard feelings) but leave room to cry, weep and start over. The educator can share in this, make the child feel that he knows, understands and sympathizes. Rituals can sometimes also be very comforting and liberating because they express the unspeakable and connect with a perspective that transcends us as humans.

Dealing with the future

Does the child also have a future time notion to which it can project itself? Every person needs something that can be looked forward to with desire. Where do I go to and how will it be there? Are there landmarks, signposts, shelters that I know I will be able to go to? If a child has little or no future prospects or if due to circumstances it does (or dare not to) not pay attention to it, the educator can actually do something. Help the child feel desire. 'Sunday we are going to bake pancakes, in a few weeks the young dogs will be born, next summer we will go to sea camping' ... Making plans, discussing dreams is never meaningless. Providing a child with small steps of hope and perspective, especially if the future as a whole is too threatening. "If I knew that tomorrow the world was going to end, I'd plant an apple tree today" Luther said. It brings in a perspective that extends beyond our time.

Being present in the moment

Sharing ordinary life here and now is very healing for a child that cannot (yet) be at home in the past or future. Activating the child, letting it play, taking care of it, letting it taste something, making it laugh ... turns the 'here and now' into a home and a place of life joy. The power of the ordinary and doing things together is not to be underestimated in this. It is in the 'here and now' that a child can carry out the processing work at its own pace so that it can also be at home in the past. From the 'here and now' emerges the energy that makes one yearn for the future. The seed of a dream is planted in the ground of the actual moment.

1.4 What does the educator's presence require?

W. ter Horst describes four conditions that must be fulfilled in order for an educator to be meaningfully present in education: (1) the educator needs vitality, life force that he can pass on; (2) he must be open and focused on the child; (3) he must master the basic forms of human contact; (4) he must finally be able to recharge and refuel.

Vitality

"Only where there is plenty of life new life can arise or 'old' life can recover" (page 21).

This vitality can be described in many terms: courage, strength, joy of life, future perspective, hope, trust, perseverance, pleasure, faith, responsibility ... The question is whether the educator has enough of this vitality. A number of factors can stand in the way.

- If an educator is inadequately fit due to fatigue or merely asleep for lack of interest, vitality is compromised. Self-care and good working and living conditions are a prerequisite.
- Maturity not yet acquired can also form a stumbling block. If an educator is not yet himself sufficiently through the process of maturing, vitality is lost. The educator then is more concerned with himself than with the child. When someone who is immature cannot be suspended of an educational task, strong support will be required. Hard but not impossible.
- Being absorbed by other worries or grief can also suck away one's vitality. Everyone has problems and needs to develop strategies to handle them. If this assignment becomes too overwhelming, external support must be provided (concrete help, conversation, therapy ...). Alertness is required when someone cultivates problems or hides behind them out of fear for the vulnerable and overwhelming responsibility of parenting.

Openness and focus on the child

To be truly present for the child there has to be an openness and an alertness for the signals and messages that the child sends out. Sometimes, however, that openness is limited. A lack of the vitality mentioned above may be the cause for this, for example. But also certain prejudices or too fast judgments can take away the openness. The educator too often has a fixed view, so that the real needs of the child are no longer discernible and behavior is set that fits in with the judgment but not with the child. Openness requires a postponement of judgment, an observing and searching attitude, conversation and willingness to listen. The 'receiving equipment' of an educator must therefore be well attuned to the child.

But he also has to learn to adapt and adjust his 'transmission equipment' to the child. A message that is not well-directed doesn't reach the child. People sometimes assume that something is clear while the child does not know or does not understand what we are talking about. "Prepare yourself" is a message that is too vague for some children. Which concrete steps are expected? Very difficult for the child are some ambiguous messages the educator sometimes sends out. What is said is not consistent with what the body language expresses. "Very fascinating what you say", telling with your nose in the newspaper is not coherent. Children are especially sensitive to action signals and deduce rejection. Focus on the child also means that you consciously judge right when to intervene or when to leave the initiative with the child. There is no fixed recipe for making the right choice in

this. Only the permanent consideration for what can help the child to further develop and focus on what that stands in its way.

Mastering the basic forms

Parenting goes hand in hand with interpersonal contact. We sometimes forget that there are many more forms of human contact than going into conversation. That is because when we think about education and assistance we are too often rather oriented intellectually. There are, however, a whole series of basic forms of interpersonal intercourse that a child must acquire and that an educator must control and handle. It concerns the group of human skills previously listed in this article and that together give form to ordinary life: touching, caring, playing, eating and drinking, celebrating, going out, working, learning, speaking ...

The fact that an educator himself can technically perform all these basic forms does not mean that he can also use them well in education.

Does the educator know how a child should be touched at different stages of life? Does he know the technique of taking care of a child? Can he prepare a customized meal? Can he make a trip with children? Can he teach children something? Can he animate their game or let them speak freely to each other?

The introduction or restoration of these basic forms where necessary is crucial in education.

Children must be able to experience these basic forms, study them and learn to handle them appropriately. The fact that some children cannot simply use certain basic forms due to their limitations should not be a reason to drop them. Then you have to find out what still is possible.

Recharge and refuel

The reserve in vitality you have as an educator must stay up to standard levels if you want to be a real educator for the children and make them feel alive. The question is how you can ensure that this vitality will be recharged whenever necessary?

The first source for this is education itself. Parenting is not a 'transport technique' in which you transfer the child from here (unadulterated, undeveloped, uncivilized) to there (developed, self-reliant, civilized) sometimes in rather difficult circumstances. It is not something you do to the child. Parenting is mutual and changes both the child and the educator. Together, it is a search in a dialogical process in which both parties can ultimately receive more than they have given. The educator also becomes richer and more vital by raising.

Sometimes, however, parenting work is very demanding and is disturbed by other factors so that normal refueling does not take place or is insufficient. Then other sources must be found.

Engaging in conversation with other educators can provide energy. Bringing something new into the circle of conversation (a film, a book, a guest, a methodology, information ...) can then rekindle the fire.

Those who lose lots of energy often risk isolating themselves. Getting out of your isolation, making sure that you are surrounded, feel belonging, perhaps while being tucked back in by colleagues, is then necessary to regain vitality.

Just leaving for a while (from a few hours to a few weeks) can also help to take some distance and find a new élan.

A personal interview, process guidance, a coaching program can offer you new perspectives from which new vitality can arise.

Rituals, faith experiences, spiritual regeneration can bring you to deep life sources and to God as a source of existence. Those who are rooted in God can regain their vitality in order to pass on life again.

1.5 Don Bosco and being present in ordinary life

The pedagogical intuitions and practice of Don Bosco and his staff are remarkably well attuned to what W. ter Horst teaches us about the educational power that comes from sharing ordinary life with the child and what that requires from the educator. Providing the child with care and safety, helping it to get out of its shell and discovering where it can be unique, patting patiently until the right entrance is found, learning the basic forms of life, processing the past and finding a future perspective, experiencing the joy of life in the moment here and now...

All of that is reflected in the pedagogical offer that Don Bosco developed for his youngsters. If you read the biographies he wrote about young people from this point of view, you will find all these elements.³ He also realized very well that in order to be able to do that well, an educator had to be present in a qualitative and involved manner. There is also a great deal about this in his writings. That this is not a simple task was clear to him. Don Bosco quite literally wrote this in the document about the preventive system he made in 1877 (on the occasion of the opening of the house in Nice). "The practice of this system is based entirely on the words of St. Paul, who says: *Charitas patiens est, benigna est; omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet*" (Love is patient and long-suffering; it tolerates everything, but hopes everything and endures every inconvenience).⁴

"Perhaps someone will notice that this system is difficult in practice. I would like to point out that it is much easier for the students, gives more satisfaction and generates greater benefits. For the educators it does involve a few difficulties. However, these roads are less burdened when the educator devotes himself with diligence to his work. The educator is someone who is committed to the welfare of his students. He must therefore be prepared to cope with every inconvenience and fatigue in order to achieve his goal, which consists in the civil, moral and scientific education of his pupils."⁵

In this way wanting to be present with children and young people is a choice and a commitment. A calling actually. It requires the educator to become a guide and companion who, with always renewed expertise, compassion and maturity, sets out with the child.

That was a challenge at Don Bosco's time and it still is now.

³ A fascinating exploration of those biographies and the model of guidance that emerges from them is given in the lecture by Michal Vojtas on the spirituality days of the Salesian family in Turin in January 2018. The text can be found at www.sdb.org under Famiglia Salesiana - giornate spiritualità della FS - GFS Giornate FS 18-21 gennaio 2018. Michal Vojtas relied on the study work of Aldo Giraudo to draw on Don Bosco's coaching model from the biographies. The elements W. ter Horst mentions are striking present in that model.

⁴ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco Educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, LAS ROMA, 2005, p. 250

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 255

Part 2 Presence under pressure

2.1 Problems with presence

There can only be an educating influence from you if you are sufficiently present in the parenting event. Yet we notice that the presence of many educators comes under pressure in two ways: not being present anymore and no longer being present effectively. We briefly explore both problems.

Not being present anymore

Educators regularly get into a dilemma between wanting to respect certain rights and being vigilant. A number of values have become almost a kind of sacred cow in our time and context. The pressure to respect these values can, however, paralyze educators and deprive them of their initiative.

An example of this is 'respect for privacy'. The importance of this has become so great that they feel that it is no longer socially accepted to be effectively vigilant. For example, can you enter the room of a young person who has friends visiting and clearly gives you the message that you are not welcome? Can you search a school bag if you suspect drug abuse? Can you check which sites a young person has visited while surfing on the internet?

Another value is the right to express freely your opinions and that those opinions should be taken in account. Should you allow a sixteen-year-old to not participate in a planned activity because he does not feel like it? Do you agree when an adolescent forbids you to pick him up after a party because he will feel ashamed? The value that you can and must solve everything communicatively also brings educators into trouble. A young person claims that he himself will keep the agreements made about computer use under control and protests that you do not trust him if you want to check it. Until you find him again at 4 o'clock in the morning behind his personal computer.

It is of course important that you give children freedom of movement, that you give them confidence and give them a say and that you respect their privacy. But how do you ensure that the care for these values does not put you aside as educator and makes it impossible for you to educate?

No longer be effectively present

Many educators get messed up because they find no way to handle and adjust difficult behavior among young people. Their authority is under pressure. The old way to exercise authority is no longer acceptable nor desirable, but they do not find an adequate alternative.

In the past, authority was mainly based on distance and repression. Authority was derived from status and position and empowered by society. Those who had the authority did not have to justify themselves. "Why?", "That's why!" ... An educator who let his anger run freely by screaming, scolding, and even hitting was not called upon. The degree of authority was measured by the extent to which someone could exercise control and be obeyed. Keeping the authority was seen as a struggle 'it is him or me' and interpreted in terms of winning or losing 'if he does not have to do that punishment then he has won'. Having authority was a question of honor. Doubting or contesting it was seen as an insult. In an incident the honor

of the educator was at stake and the young person had to be humiliated to restore the balance. If this did not work, the educator suffered a loss of face. It is clear that we no longer want to return to these beliefs and forms of authority because they violate a number of fundamental rights of the youngster. For a time, the ideals of anti-authoritarian education were shifted to the other extreme. Freedom, autonomy and empowerment were central. It was thought rather naively that in that free space, young people would automatically develop into good human beings. Most educators are back on the ground with both feet. Things do not automatically go in the right direction. Too much freedom can be very destructive for young people. A young person needs guidance to develop adequately. But that does not solve the problem of the educator. How can he be present and act meaningfully and adequately with authority without returning to the old authority model?

2.2 Restoring presence from new authority

A number of interesting insights to deal with these challenges were developed by Haim Omer, professor of psychology in Tel Aviv.⁶ He speaks of a 'new authority' in which the presence of the educator is explicitly restored as a basic requirement of education and retrieval authority. From the inspiration of the non-violent resistance by minority groups (e.g. the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi) he developed a very different view of and approach to authority. His insights help to overcome the dilemmas where the emphasis on certain values threaten to trap the educator. They also offer a way out of the impasse where one does not want the old authority model back but finds no useful alternative in anti-authoritarianism.

New authority is characterized by proximity and support instead of distance and obedience. It is about being an active educator in the life of the child, supporting it where necessary and ensuring that it can fully develop. The idea that you as an educator can 'control' the child is abolished because you never can or will be able to. What you can do is check your own behavior. Even more, just by changing your own behavior, you can change the child's behavior. New authority is seen as an 'authoritative' upbringing style that is 'responsive'. This means that it seeks connection with the child and at the same time sets the necessary limits to allow the child to grow into a balanced adult. We explore a number of basic concepts from the conceptual framework on new authority below.

Presence of the educator

By being present in the life of the child you as an educator give the message: "I love you and I want to see what you are doing." You follow the child, not to check it but to see if all is well and if it does not do things that harm its development.

The question that arises is whether that does not go too far and the privacy of the child is not compromised. Every child is entitled to have a private space but that right is not absolute. It is limited if it does not go well with the child and if you are concerned that it is doing things that are not good for it or others. The right to privacy is therefore weighed and put into perspective on the basis of good development for every child. And that is

⁶ H. OMER, *The New Authority: Family, School and Community*, University Press, Cambridge, 2010

something that the child cannot judge for itself but that you are responsible for as an educator.

W. ter Horst says that the educator has five responsibilities.⁷

- He is treasurer because a child is a treasure, a pearl that you are proud of and careful with. The educator offers protection and safety to the child.
- He is a gardener who cares for the child. It needs food, clothing, attention and love to grow and develop.
- He is a shepherd who puts the posts so that the sheep do not run away or be in danger. Not because he wants to be the boss but because he has a heart for his animals and wants all to go well, he draws limits and he learns to listen.
- He is a guide who points the way. Children come into a world full of challenges and do not always see the possibilities nor dangers. They get lost and lose their courage. The educator then takes them by the hand up to where it is no longer needed.
- He is a priest who points at the meaning of life. Together they experience golden moments that they both learn from.

Haim Omer uses another powerful image. He says that as an educator you are an anchor where the child hangs on like a boat on a line. When the water is calm, the line is loosened so that the child can quietly explore and enjoy the world. When danger threatens, the waves become too high and the child risks to drown, the line is tightened and the child is drawn closer to the educator so that he can keep an eye on it and make sure all goes well.⁸

All these metaphors point at the responsibility of the educator and measure his assignment about when to come closer and intervene to safeguard the development of the child and to guarantee care for others.

The 'we' in the upbringing or the educating community

An important addition and refinement in the presence of the educator is that you can never do it alone and neither have to do it alone. You are part of a community to which you can and must appeal. The endorsement of authority no longer lies in the position or social recognition, but in the 'WE' of the educating community around the child. The authority of the educator does not depend solely on him but is supported and executed by the whole educating community. That takes the pressure off the shoulders from the educator and takes away the feeling of powerlessness. By engaging in a supporting network, the burden and responsibility are shared. You support each other and also the child by saying: "We will not let you go, we will not give you up". The network is activated to find out how the development of the child can be restarted in order to improve its well-being. The focus here is not on the search for the cause of the problem (because that seldom contributes to solving it) but on the future by looking to how one can take a stand against undesirable behavior and in cooperation with the child look for other behavioral patterns that make recovery possible.

It is not always easy for educators to admit that they are not able to raise the child. Often problems are concealed and people get stuck in a kind of spiral of silence. Yet it is crucial

⁷ W. TER HORST, *Wijs me de weg!*, Kok Publishers, Kampen, 1995

⁸ H. OMER and E. LEBOWITZ, *Ängstliche Kinder unterstützen, The Elterliche Ankerfunktion*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2007

to break through and search for a supporting network. 'A whole village is needed to raise a child', says an African proverb. Breaking the silence and naming the own inability to exercise authority, paradoxically often causes the turnaround that allows educators to regain their authority.

Also for Don Bosco this 'we' of the educational community was always a lived and experienced reality.

Take a position

Taking a position means that you clearly state that you find certain behavior unacceptable and that you want it to stop. What kind of behavior is that? About any behavior that threatens the development of the child or harms others. The fact that you do not accept this behavior is expressed from concern about the well-being of the child, whereby this concern is explicitly mentioned. It is important that this can be named without letting the situation escalate. The battle is not fueled, on the contrary by non-violent resistance you will de-escalate the situation. You do not enter into discussion, there is no preaching, accusing or moralizing. There is no threat or punishment. The behavior is clearly mentioned and then 'parked' in a calm way with the intention to get back to it later. Haim Omer calls that 'forging the iron when it is cold'. At a later moment, in cooperation with the supporting network, the behavior becomes a topic again and the necessary is done to set out for behavioral change and recovery.⁹

Alert care

The core of new authority is vigilant care. Being present in the life of the child who experiences that one loves him and knows that he is supported in his growth towards adulthood. Vigilant care means that people are observant and alert. That one knows when things are going well with the child but also detects the signs when it moves into the danger zone. When one receives signals, the educator will come closer and moves from a non-intervening presence to the targeted questioning and if necessary a unilateral intervention. He does so, even though these are not popular steps, because the development of the child or the safety of others is compromised. He can activate the supporting network.

Behavior change

Working on behavioral change only makes sense if both parties are calm. Hence the expression 'forging the iron when it is cold'. After a 'cool-down' (which can sometimes take a few days) you will come back on the event. It can be very meaningful that one or more members from the supporting network are present to confirm the message about the stated behavior. The way that message is delivered is important. Haim Omer calls this method a 'sit-in'. The sit-in can be done in several ways or places, it is important that it happens at a quiet moment. Parents, for example, go to the child's room, close the door behind them

⁹ The link with what Don Bosco writes in his treatise on the preventive system 1877 is striking. "Otherwise, and I would say the opposite, is the preventive system. It consists in making the laws and regulations of an institution known and supervise them in such a way that the students are always under the watchful eye of the director or of the assistants who speak as loving fathers, serve as guides to every problem, give advice and point out errors. It is meant to bring the students as much as possible into the impossibility of making mistakes." P. BRAIDO, Don Bosco Educatori. Scritti e testimonianze, LAS ROMA, 2005, p. 249. Also the whole circular letter about 'punishment in the salesian houses' of 1883 aspirates the same spirit. Idem p.317-333.

and put themselves in such a way that it is difficult for the child to leave the room. The start is always expressing concern for the well-being and positive development of the child. Then in concrete, non-reproaching terms, it is briefly stated what exactly happened. Then the child is asked to think about a solution in order to repair the damage it has caused. Then it is kept silent for 15 to 30 minutes (depending on the age and level of the child). One waits for the child to come up with a solution or not. When the child starts accusing, threatening, protesting or blaming, the educators do not allow themselves to be tempted to argue or quarrel. They are waiting calmly. If a good proposal comes up then it is said that the solution will get a chance and the sit-in is ended. If after 15/30 minutes there is no solution, the child is thanked for thinking along. The educators express that it is a pity that the reflection has not been successful and that they will return to it another time. Several of these moments can follow. If a solution provided by the child is tried out but does not give the expected results (which happens regularly and is part of the learning process) and the behavior pops up again, the educators can return to the problem via a sit-in. Patience and perseverance are needed to work on behavioral change in this way. Undesirable behavior is often long-time grounded and does not disappear easily. New behavior must be learned in order to let the old wear out. If the child does not come up with a proposal for a number of times, a solution or restore gesture (to repair the damage) can be imposed by the educators. The educators then indicate that the child has not found a solution and that they have therefore made a decision while waiting for the child to come up with a valid proposal or gesture.

The quiet determination and perseverance of the educators have a big impact on the child. It gets a double signal. First, that certain behavior is not accepted and that the educators consistently will react against it. At the same time, the child also receives a message of great commitment. It shows that these adults are worried and concerned. It proves that they find it worthwhile to put time and energy into him or her. Both messages have a profound effect.

Restoring the relationship

The ultimate goal of this way of being present with the child is the restoration of the relationship that is damaged by certain events but is basically still present! The educator can promote this by offering relationship gestures. They give the message that the educator wants to restore the relationship. It implicitly also says that the educator rejects the behavior, but not the child itself.

Relationships gestures often consist of small concrete things such as preparing something tasty. Sometimes it is initially difficult for the child to accept this gesture. It is important not to get angry about that. Relational gestures cannot be imposed. Their consistent continuing offer let the child understand that the adult really cares about him.

2.3 Don Bosco and authority

Again we see some striking parallel between the approach and the convictions of Don Bosco and the insights about new authority. Don Bosco explicitly questioned the common thinking about authority, especially where distance, punishment and threat were the issue. He also saw an alternative to this in the vigilant presence of the educator. He encourages his educators to warn the youngsters preventively. This is in line with what Haim Omer calls 'vigilant care' and 'taking position'. The fundamental motivation is always the development

of the child. In the approach of Don Bosco, this concern is also first mentioned to the child before it is being reprimanded. The educator is urged to check himself and not to react from anger and emotion, but only when he has found the necessary rest and self-control (forge the iron when it is cold). Not joining in the aggression and de-escalating are part of the intervention for Don Bosco too. The relationship is the most important lever in education. Caring for this relationship and building or restoring trust is therefore crucial. Working on behavioral change in Don Bosco's time was much more and evidently religiously framed and explained than today. Destructive behavior was understood as 'sinful' and asked for conversion and restoration through standard forms such as the sacrament of confession. It is therefore not surprising that Don Bosco attached so much importance to confession because it provided a format for working in a dialogical way on behavioral change. Just as with Omer, a contribution is expected from the young person himself. The idea of non-violent resistance such as functioning in a sit-in for example, was not directly addressed here, but the awareness of the need for recovery was strongly present. Concrete gestures of recovery also often originated from that confessional discussion.

In the texts of Don Bosco, the idea of the 'we' in education that supports the authority is not explicitly present. Authority was less publicly questioned in his society. Yet that 'we' is implicitly present in his practice where upbringing actually took place in an educative community. Today's insights can enrich the salesian charisma even further in this area.