

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE EDUCATOR IN THE PREVENTIVE METHOD OF EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*This article is an attempt to discover the significance, meaning, and practice of 'presence' in the Preventive method of education. John Bosco commonly known as Don Bosco was a nineteenth-century educator. Among his many pioneering works for the young people of his time, he is best known for his educative method known as the Preventive method of education. Don Bosco was unique in his approach to educating young people. For Don Bosco, the loving presence of the educator among his pupils and a warm relationship among them was a must to nurture the three pillars of his educational philosophy namely, Reason Religion, and Rapport. The physical presence of the educator, as an indispensable aspect of this method, plays a major role. It's a requisite imperative, which demands the sacrifice of an educator's time, energy, aspirations, and interests for the concerns of the educand. The educator is expected to be present with the pupil, at all times and in every situation. In this article, the authors discuss the role of presence in the Preventive method of education and thereafter examine the various characteristics of presence in this method.*

**Key Words :** Preventive method, Presence, Don Bosco, Expressive method.

## Introduction

John Bosco commonly known as Don Bosco was a nineteenth-century educator. Among his many pioneering works for the young people of his time, he is best known for his educative method known as the Preventive method of education. In his autobiography, *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855* (Bosco J., *Memoirs of the Oratory; The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, 2009), he explains his method of education. He wrote the nuances of this educational method only after practicing it for several years and looking after hundreds of boys in his oratory. This method of education was quite different from the Repressive method which was the trend then. His genius was in placing this system in the three pillars of Reason, Religion, and Relationship (Rapport/Loving-kindness). By doing this he gave to the education a universal stance with a resolve to the development of the mind (Reason), to acquire values based on good religious moral stance and ethics (Religion), and on a relationship built between the educator and the educand through the loving presence of the educator among his pupils (Relationship). For Don Bosco, the loving presence of the educator among his pupils and a warm relationship among them was a must to nurture reason and religion.

## The Preventive Method of Education

Preventive method was not an invention of Don Bosco. He adopted this name for his method of education only in 1877, even though he had begun to practice it already in 1841. Don Bosco was a product of his time. So the reason for his choosing this name may be found in the prevailing nineteenth-century 'preventive mentality' that was felt in the educational, social, political, penal, and religious spheres of human life. He lived this method and applied it in his work for the youth first. It is only after many years of experimenting with the system that he named it. In 1877, on the occasion of the inauguration of the first house outside Italy, at Nice in France, he replied to a query that he used the Preventive system instead of the Repressive system.

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### **Presence of the Educator and Personal Relationship with the Educand**

In practice, this method of education was very much acceptable for the youth of his time. The young boys who were with him were mostly orphans in as much as they had nobody to care for and hardly any place to go except their places of work where they were exploited by their masters. So Don Bosco had to make it work as per the existing situation of the time. For him, a youngster must feel loved and be happy in the place of his existence here and now. So a loving, caring and joyful presence of the educator vibrating a sense of positive energy at the places of learning is an important aspect of the educational methodology of Don Bosco. During learning, an educand has to be seen by the educator. Therefore the presence of the teacher is a must in this method. This presence calls for greater accountability and is highly demanding. An educator who practices this system should not see the students as a liability and his presence as a burden. Being present with the student is an opportunity for the educator to bring about the holistic growth of the educand.

A pupil should feel at home in the presence of the educator. So it must be a welcoming presence. It must be a proactive presence that takes that first step to make the pupil unpretentiously happy. They must be cordial, warm, and open. The presence of the educator must motivate the student and not be frigid. This reassuring presence should verbally and silently cheer the student to perform better boost the energy within. The educator's presence and the tactful use of excursions, quizzes, queries, debates, puzzles, etc., should nurture in them a thirst for knowledge and urge them to perform better.

### **Characteristics of Presence**

Don Bosco described this presence among the students as 'Assistance'. An educator is expected to assist one's pupils in every situation in that they are together. So

the Constitutions and Regulations of the members of the society that Don Bosco began define assistance as "An empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them." (Panampara) Don Bosco used to say "Here, in your midst, I feel completely at home; for me, living means being here with you." (Panampara). Being with the students is not an easy task. Peter Gonsalves enumerates certain practical skills an educator needs to have in being present to students in formal and non-formal settings (Gonsalves, *Educating for a Happy Life in Don Bosco's Way*, 2011).

### **Friendly Presence – The Fundamental Constituent of Preventive Method**

The presence of the teacher among his pupils as one of them is a must to establish a friendly relationship. For Don Bosco, this presence is the fulcrum around which the whole of this method revolved. There is a special affinity between the educator and the pupils. The rapport that the educator expresses through his respectful love and care for each student is one of the distinctive and unique features of this method. Each student is known personally well to the educator. The students feel loved, recognized, valued, and accepted. The students who are socially marginalized and differently-abled value this type of attitude on the part of the educator. This welcoming and non-threatening presence is a motivating factor as it prevents the young from committing mistakes through the timely interventions of the educator. The educator is expected to love what his pupil love, without losing his/her self-dignity as a teacher. He/she should be friendly with all but intimate with none (Corcoran).

### **The Method of 'Word in the Ear'**

Don Bosco envisaged a caring private admonition that is meant to animate, support, correct, persuade and motivate the young, which he called 'word in the ear' or 'Parolina' (Morrison, 1999). It is an informal corrective method, used mainly during the time of recreation. Here the teacher is expected to communicate personally and if possible in a soft voice in the ear of the educand, without hurting, what he/she wants to say. Don Bosco's timely advice to his boys, despite the place where they were in, pierced their hearts. He would go near a person and say "Shall I tell you something?". Then he would whisper, bending over to

the person's ear, an observation, encouragement, recommendation, and sometimes a correction that need immediate attention. This takes only a moment but would make the student think and change for the better as it touches his heart. Don Bosco never encouraged public corrections. He would discourage his teachers from scolding the students harshly. He used to say, "If you have to give any correction, do it privately, in secret, and with the greatest sweetness" (Morrison, 1999). 'Word in the ear' can be an effective method in trustful relationships between a teacher and pupil. Don Bosco used to suggest that the best way to conquer the heart of a youngster is to show him/her that you sincerely love them and do everything for their good. This love and respect that the educator gives to one's pupils make them love what the educator love and cares for.

### **Animating Presence**

The presence of the educator is not an idle one but is an active animating presence among the educand. The educator has dedicated his life and chosen this profession for that purpose. Therefore the teacher is to be present in the place of animation before the pupils arrive and is expected to leave only after the students leave. According to this method, the best and the most effective teacher is the one who leaves last, the place where the students are completing one activity, and arrives at the next place of the student's activity first. So the teacher is to be present and animate the students in all their activities. This animation has to be a creative one. An educator is creative in animating and respects and values creativity on the part of one's pupils. So the educator does not oppress or punish but encourages and emanates joy and optimism through one's words and actions. To animate well, a teacher has to know the interest of the educand and create an ambiance in the place where they are to bring out the best in every pupil present there. Don Bosco used to say "Run, jump, have all the fun you want at the right time, but for heaven's sake, do not commit sin." (Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, 1972). He used every means at his disposal to keep his pupils occupied and happy. A teacher may make one's presence a cheerful and productive one through music, theatre, band, games, excursions, outings, etc.

All these bring out the best in one's pupils and holistically develop their potential. The presence of the educator is the selfless service of an animator. It's not a passive presence but an active one.

### **Empathetic Presence**

An educator who practices this method of education ought to get into the shoes of the pupil and feel one with them. This is possible only if the educator is dedicated and ready to give oneself up for the students. An educator must cultivate the qualities of listening and accompanying one's students in all aspects of their life. An educator must be a friend, teacher, and guide. An educator's presence must be in such a way that, he/she sometimes acts as a teacher or guide, often as a father or mother (parent), and always as a friend. They should feel one with the student always

### **A Presence that Prepares the Youth for Life**

The presence of the educator is to be a nurturing presence among the pupils. It must help the students to prepare for a better future. In the dream that Don Bosco had at the age of nine, he encountered a group of ruffians but slowly his presence transformed them into meek lambs. (Bosco T., 2005). An educator's duty is not only to give information on various subjects that one teaches but to transform the educand and ignite in them a passion for life and compassion for their society, country, and the world as a whole. It helps them to develop solid convictions and assume responsibility for their life. An educator must become aware that it is not our orations and reprimands that transform the educand but his/her friendly and caring presence.

### **A Presence that Makes the Student Aware of God**

A deeper look into the life and work of Don Bosco shows that his practice of presence had a divine motive behind it. Among the three pillars of this method, he gave a special place to religion (Kapani, 2022). As a Catholic priest, for him, the presence of a teacher is not only meant for helping the students to do the right things, but also to teach them about the presence of God. He always repeated the phrase, "God Sees you". The student saw the presence of God in one's teacher. Thus Don Bosco gave a spiritual connotation to the presence of this educative method. He calls this presence "Assistance" and the teacher "Assistant". So he used to say "In every corner make sure that there is an assistant. Put him there with sagacity." (Krishnaraj, 1978). The presence; though looks merely physical but is spiritually motivated. Don Bosco used to tell his students

“Mind, therefore, that whatever my worth, I am here every moment of the day and night for you. I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare.”(Bosco J. B., 1988).

### A Vigilant Presence

Though the educator participates in every activity of the students fully, he/ she is expected to be vigilant about all that is happening around. It helps them to be attentive to every need of the students. It compels them to be alert to anything that destroys the good spirit that is prevailing there. The educator is cautious and very observant of every word and deed of the students. This helps the educator to be aware of the dangers that the pupils can get into and be on their guard.

### Relevance of Presence in Today's Education

Amidst technological advancement of the twenty-first century, where virtual presence is the norm of the day, the absence of physical presence of a person who cares creates an emptiness in the life of young people. Technology cannot replace the love and care of a human person. The modern generation living amidst the internet hype and the hysteria of social media feels that they are always in a crowd and are bombarded with so much information, fun, and celebrations. Yet, they feel lonely. Every young person longs for someone to listen to him/her with patience and stand by him/her with their nurturing presence. When a person passes through obscurities of pain, sickness, loss of dear ones, failures, and struggles to find meaning in one's existence, the physical presence of a mentor or a guide or an educator is a must. The presence of a mature person can make the young stand their ground when expressing exuberant joy and happiness. So the physical presence of an educator is all the more valid today than ever before.

### Conclusion

Being present in someone's life, especially a person who is much younger than oneself is not an easy task. It demands the sacrifice of one's time, plans, enjoyments, etc. An enthusiastic educator who practices the Preventive method of education is not hesitant to forgo anything for the good of one's students. He/she finds meaning, satisfaction, and fulfillment in their profession by being present in the educand. Such an educator creates a lifelong relationship with his pupils. The pupils fall back to them for advice even after leaving the educational institution. Thus an effective presence of the educator makes the educand an honest citizen of one's country.

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