

# THE SALESIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE

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## 1. Introduction

“I have come that you may have life, life in abundance” (*Jn* 10:10). This invitation of Jesus may have been the driving force that spurred Don Bosco to work tirelessly for the youngsters of his time—which was a period of growing unrest because of major political and social upheavals—so that they could lead a fruitful life. Don Bosco’s mission was clear. He wanted to transform these ragamuffins into ‘good Christians and honest citizens.’

In trying to accomplish this aim of transforming his boys into ‘good Christians and honest citizens,’ Don Bosco used the best means available in his days – the Preventive System. It would be more fitting in the present to call it the ‘System of Expression.’ Don Bosco used the word ‘preventive’ because he wanted to distinguish his system from the repressive system common in his days. In fact, this system is preventive, because it is primarily and intrinsically expressive: through spontaneous expression it gives power to the young to develop their own capacities for all-round growth. Rather than curbing the youngsters, this system fosters in them a freedom to be themselves, it encourages creativity and drives away fear. The system did not originate with Don Bosco; it existed before him in various ways. Don Bosco’s major contribution was to simplify it and to show how it actually functioned. His Oratory was indeed a laboratory where educators could come and see the transformation taking place in his boys thanks to the expressive method.

Many times and on various occasions Don Bosco was invited to explain the principles inspiring his experiment which worked so well even with difficult youngsters. He attempted to put down some of these principles in a booklet in 1877, *Il sistema preventivo nell’educazione della gioventù*. In 1882, talking to the Minister of Justice, Urbano Rattazzi, who was very interested in his work for youth, this is how Don Bosco described his system:

“Your Excellency knows that in education there are two systems: one is called the repressive system and the other is called the preventive system. The former aims at educating man with force, repressing and punishing him when he has violated the law and committed a crime. The latter aims at educating him with loving-kindness and thus it gently helps him to observe the law and gives him the most efficacious means to do this. This is the system that we use. Here before all else we try to infuse the holy fear of God into the heart of the young, inspiring them with love of virtue and horror of vice, by teaching catechism and giving suitable moral instructions; we direct and help them on the way to goodness with opportune, kind advice and especially with the practices of piety and religion. Besides, so far as possible, we surround them with a loving assistance in recreation, in school, at work;

we encourage them with kind expressions and as soon as they seem to forget their duties, we remind them of them, in a kindly manner and recall them to goodness.”<sup>1</sup>

Reason, religion and loving-kindness define before all else the contents of Don Bosco’s pastoral, spiritual and educational message. The whole system is to be considered not only as an effort to synthesize the various elements in order to arrive at a complete development of the boy (physical, intellectual, emotional, religious), but also as a sufficiently organic complex of interventions, methods and means to interest and stimulate the boy to develop himself to his full potential. The seriousness of the moral and religious engagement (duty, piety, living in grace, fleeing sin) is proposed and promoted through reasonable and living relations and processes. Sweetness and loving-kindness are not mistaken for weakness or sentimentality, because they are constantly being enlightened and purified by reason and religion. Rules and regulations for interpersonal relations are constantly motivated and perfected by the fervour of religious piety and by the empathic participation of the educator, who is present above all else as animator.<sup>2</sup>

Being organic, the three components of reason, religion and loving-kindness need to be both constantly present and interacting with each other, whether as educational objectives or as formative processes in order to give to the ‘system’ a solid methodological unity. But it is *amorevolezza* (loving-kindness) that is the unifying element in this system. For this reason the preventive pedagogy of charity is characterized in Don Bosco by the particular tonality of Christian and human love ‘felt by the pupil,’ ‘shown’ to him, expressed as sweetness, patience, loving-kindness (goodness, benignity, understanding, patience, friendship, immediacy).<sup>3</sup>

## **2. *Amorevolezza*: The Basis for Growth**

There is nothing that can expand the human soul, actualize human potential for growth, or bring a person into the full possession of life more than a healthy dose of love. Real growth comes when someone empowers another to believe in himself and to be all he can be, and this can be done only through love.

Love means showing care for the other, affirming the other as a uniquely valuable person and promoting the other’s happiness. But love is more than merely doing acts of kindness to the other. True love must liberate the other. It must give to the other both a sense of belonging and a sense of freedom. It must instill in the other the confidence to believe in his own ability to take on the problems and opportunities of life. And finally, love must invite the other to ‘stretch,’ to grow beyond old limitations, to attempt what was always considered too difficult, to break a self-destructive habit that has always been too overpowering, to rise above a fear, to give up a grudge, to open up a repressed feeling, to confront a difficult situation, to move on in one’s journey towards wholeness and fullness.

The truth about love is that it must be encouraging, affirming and comforting, and at the same time challenging, confronting, and urging to move forward.

This was the kind of love that was at the heart of Don Bosco’s expressive system. He knew that nothing would be of greater help for the youngsters to come out of themselves, to change a bad habit, to aspire towards holiness than by showering them

with love and by creating an atmosphere of love in the Oratory. For Don Bosco, love was not just a method of educating; it was for him a way of being with his boys, a manner of living. In a letter of 10 February 1885 to Msgr. Cagliero he wrote: "Advise all our people to direct their efforts to two cardinal points: Make yourselves loved and not feared."<sup>4</sup> On another occasion he advised: "If you wish to be loved by the boys, be lovable."<sup>5</sup> And again, "Let the boys not only be loved but let them know that they are loved.... Being loved in the things they like, as in taking part in their childish inclinations, let them learn to see love in the things they naturally like little, such as discipline, study, self-mortification; and let them learn to do these things with earnestness and love.... If one knows that one is loved, one loves in return and the one who loves obtains anything, especially from youth."<sup>6</sup>

Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, Robert Kegan, Wilbur Smith, Scott Peck and many other modern psychologists reaffirm Don Bosco's fundamental intuition, viz. that disinterested love re-creates the person and releases the forces for his growth to maturity. When love is given, it becomes in the one who receives it a source of self-acceptance and self-confidence, a stimulus to self-realization and creativity, and a revelation of his own unique worth. No educator can change a pupil directly. The real change takes place within the person, depending on how he directs his freedom in respect of the plan he has for his own life. The educator can bring his influence to bear on the environment surrounding the youngster and set before him a pattern for living and a frame of values. But, in the last analysis, the young person himself must respond by opening himself spontaneously to dialogue and allowing himself to be helped. This 'opening up spontaneously' is made possible in an atmosphere of love and acceptance which Don Bosco insisted should be the hallmark of his educative system.

### **3. The Drive for Growth**

Growth is an inherent characteristic of life. All living organisms have an inner drive for growth. Human beings, in a special way, have not just the potency, but an urge to move towards self-actualization and beyond.

Carl Rogers, one of the leading psychologists of the twentieth century, in opposition to earlier mechanistic and homeostatic conceptions of understanding life, proposes that every living organism has, as its first principle, an 'actualizing tendency.' "[It is] the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to enhance the organism. It involves not only the tendency to meet what Maslow terms 'efficiency needs'... [but] it [also] involves development toward the differentiation of organs and of functions, expansions in terms of growth, expansion of effectiveness through the use of tools, expansion and enhancement through reproduction. It is development toward autonomy and away from heteronomy or control by external forces."<sup>7</sup>

Life processes do not, in other words, merely tend to preserve life. We keep moving towards greater autonomy by transcending the momentary status quo and expanding continually to gain greater control upon an ever-increasing realm of events. We believe that although early events have a primary place in the development of our personality, we have also been given the gift of self-determination. Whether we come from warm and loving homes or from homes that were conflict-ridden, whether we have

been born rich or poor, with whatever physical, social or emotional disadvantage, we still have the potential for living our lives with more and greater creativity and freedom. We believe that although our past influences us, it need not determine us, whatever it may have been. There is a yearning within the human spirit that follows something we cannot always put a name to. It is a yearning to go beyond what is known and to see more clearly what is now perceived only dimly. To achieve ever higher levels of consciousness seems to be an innate characteristic of evolving humankind. This transcending consciousness, this desire to stretch, represents the most basic tenet of growth psychology. Whatever our present circumstances, creative change is possible and something within us pushes us towards it.

#### **4. The Process of Growth**

Personality development occurs in the context of interactions between a person and his environment. It takes place in a process that involves *identification* with the environment, *differentiation* from the environment and finally a *re-integration* with the environment which includes the old and transcends it in order to arrive at another level of interaction with the environment. This process of identification, differentiation and re-integration is ongoing and persists all through life.

Life is not something static; it is a process. It is not so much that life is something in motion; life itself is motion. The word 'human being' is about being human as an activity. It is not about the doing that a human does; it is about the doing that a human is.

And what is the 'doing' that a human is continuously engaged in? It is the doing of 'meaning-making.' "Human beings are meaning-making organisms. Before an event is assimilated and responded to, it has to be made meaning of or made sense of. It is that sense or meaning which determines the nature, quality and intensity of one's inner and outer response to that experience. A person is therefore, an ever-evolving motion or activity giving itself form through the meanings it makes of events after events from the moment of birth. In other words, a person is a dynamic process or activity 'constructing' himself by giving meaning to the varied experiences he has all through his life. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception independent of a meaning-making context in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, because we are the meaning-making context."<sup>8</sup>

For example, a compliment, a critical feedback, a failure, or the realization of an unpleasant aspect of myself, can have a different impact and produce different responses depending on the dynamic process of meaning-making that is going on within me. A compliment may affirm my self-esteem, a feedback can challenge me to move forward, a failure can provide me with an opportunity for further and deeper learning, and the unpleasant discovery about myself may lead me closer to authenticity and truthfulness. The impact they have on me and the responses they elicit from me can be also quite the opposite. I may find the compliment not good enough, the feedback a put-down, the failure a catastrophe and the unpleasant discovery about myself a loss of face. It depends on my meaning-making of that particular experience.

In the process of understanding, every organism struggles to make meaning, to have meaning, to protect meaning, to enhance meaning, to lose meaning, and to lose the 'self' along the way, only to regain it in a whole new different way. It is a universal

process of constructing, defending, subordinating, surrendering and re-constructing in order to arrive at a more expanded understanding of the self in its relation with the environment. And in the process, our understanding of life comes together and falls apart; we become victims of crisis, anxiety and defenses, we experience pain and exhilaration; we become prey to meaningfulness and meaninglessness, we breakdown and breakthrough.<sup>9</sup>

This personal activity of meaning-making actually has as much to do with an adult's struggle to recognize himself in the midst of conflicting and changing feelings as it has to do with a five-year-old's struggle to recognize a written word; it has as much to do with a teenager's delicate balance between his loyalty to his own satisfaction and his emerging loyalty to the preservation of reciprocal relationships as it has to do with a one-year-old's effort to balance himself on two legs; it has as much to do with an adult's immobilizing depression, or a teenager's refusal to obey, as with a six-year-old's inability to leave home and go off to school.<sup>10</sup> All of us, at every stage, are going through a struggle to understand the environment and to interact with it in more meaningful ways.

As educators, teachers, pastors, or therapists, our role of caring will be enhanced when we understand the vulnerability of others during this struggle to *identify* with a given stage of development, *differentiate* within that stage, and finally *transcend* into the next stage of unfolding. What the eye can see better, the heart feels more deeply. If we are able to 'see' the struggle, we not only increase the likelihood of our being moved, we also run the risk of coming closer to those we live with. They come to matter more to us. Seeing better increases our vulnerability to being present to the welfare of another and subsequently increases the quality of our caring for another's development. This, for me, is 'loving-kindness in action.'

## 5. Promoting Growth

There have been various therapies and methodologies proposed over the years and used by educators (parents, teachers or counselors) to facilitate the process of growth and development in others. These therapies can be summed up into basically three steps that are necessary to help a person to move on: *Confirm*, *Challenge* and *Continue*. *Confirming* is holding, loving and affirming the person. Confirming is unconditionally accepting the person and assuring that he is okay just the way he is. *Challenging* is confronting the person to move beyond; it is recognizing that the person has potential at every stage to become more than what he now is. But challenging will be ineffective if the individual has not first experienced being sufficiently and adequately held. *Continuing* is 'being around' to assist the person integrate the new learning that has taken place as a result of 'separation from the old' and make this new learning a part his present. And again the process goes on and on, *Confirming*, *Challenging* and *Continuing* to assist the person to move forward to the next stage in his journey of life. 'Loving Kindness,' as I see it, is mastering this art of *Confirming*, *Challenging* and *Continuing* in our interactions with others and making it part of the educative process so that we enable every person to move towards his highest potential.

### 5.1 *Confirming*

Confirming is the ability to 'hold' a person. It is the ability to make a person feel loved and accepted. It is this feeling of 'being loved and accepted for just being me' that enables a youngster to first accept himself and then dig deep into his recesses and bring out whatever resources he has at his disposal to use them for his personal growth and development. Confirming is totally and unconditionally accepting the other, not for what he can do or what he can become, but for what he is. Confirming is that first quality which accepts the person as he is because he has intrinsic value in himself.

Let's take, for example, how we deal with a person who experiences anxiety. How do we respond to a child who is crying or an adult who is asking for help? The question is: What are we up to when we respond to anxiety in another person? What are we trying to do? Are we trying to make a bad feeling go away? Are we trying to make it so he can go back to feeling the way he did before? Is our response essentially to the anxiety or to the person who is feeling anxious? There is a subtle but a very critical distinction here.

The usual caring response to uncomfortable feelings is an attempt to relieve the feelings of the other. This is a well-intentioned, humane and understandable response, especially when the distressed person is one whom we love and would not like to see suffer for a single moment. But it is also an extremely problematic response.

When an educator responds to anxiety with the intention to relieve it, he has recourse to a given evolutionary state (the state of equilibrium) in opposition to another state (the state of disequilibrium). He attempts to protect made-meaning rather than the experience of meaning-making. He contributes to the feeling that the anxiety is 'not-me,' or that it is an alien experience. From experiences such as these, what the youngster is most likely to learn is that being anxious is something to be corrected; that it is wrong and bad to be in disequilibrium; and each time there is an uncomfortable feeling caused by being in a state of disequilibrium, it must be 'got rid of' in order to enjoy a feeling of comfortableness always. Uncomfortable experiences therefore will not be welcomed.

How to respond to a person in an uncomfortable situation is a fundamental question. When we respond not to the problem or relief of the problem but to the person in his experience of the problem, we acknowledge that the person is most of all a being in motion which includes the experience of balance and imbalance, each as intrinsic to life, each a part of our integrity, each deserving of dignity and respect. When we respond to the person in his experience of pain rather than to the pain or the relief of pain, we testify to our faith in the trustworthiness of the motion of evolution, to our faith in the trustworthiness of life itself. Proper 'holding' is providing careful attention, recognition, and confirmation to the person who is undergoing a certain experience, while at the same time allowing him his experience without taking it away from him. Proper 'holding' ensures that we do not allow the person to tighten his grip on us by creating a dependence for solving or managing his experiences of disequilibrium. When we respond instead by relieving the pain, we communicate a basic lack of trust and move from 'holding' the person to 'creating a dependency' which is an impediment to the process of development.<sup>11</sup>

The ability to remain present for another when he is anxious, to recognize and accept his anxiety without ourselves becoming too anxious or immediately trying to relieve the anxiety, has long been understood to be an important feature of competent professional help. When the person who is anxious notices that the other accepts him

with his anxiety, he then finds no reason then to run away from his own anxiety and works through it to resolve his anxiety in a way that is growth promoting.

In our Salesian system of education, building an *adequate rapport* with boys is our manner of ‘confirming’ or ‘holding’ an individual in his process of growth. An ‘adequate rapport’ ensures that we neither ‘over hold’ an individual (we don’t have favourites or show partiality) nor do we keep anyone apart (we realize that each one is in need of holding). We respect the evolutionary process that every individual is going through and assure the person that we are there to understand him in his struggle. We learn to be compassionate without being sympathetic; we show empathy without trying to rescue them from the turmoil they experience as a result of the continuous growing that needs to take place. In Don Bosco’s relationship with his boys, each boy believed that he had a ‘special relationship’ with him. Don Bosco repeatedly told his Salesians that it is not enough to love our boys but that we need to make them know that they are loved.

## 5.2 Challenging

There are several questions that we are confronted with as we engage in interacting with youngsters. Are we interested in just the *individual* who is with us, or are we interested in the *person* who is in the process of becoming, evolving and unfolding? While we *hold* with unconditional positive regard the existential integrity of the individual as he is at the moment, what do we do with his developmental quality? Since our commitment must be not just to the individual but primarily to the person who is in the process of becoming, how should we exercise our function of challenging, that is, how should we confront his state of equilibrium in order to assist him to move on? How do we facilitate in him a process of dis-identification, differentiation, and transcendence?

This is not an easy task either for the educator or for the youngster, especially when we love the youngster dearly. This is not easy also because we are dealing with not just one or two individuals, but a group of youngsters that are in our charge. Creating disequilibrium is allowing and actually facilitating some sort of chaos and disturbance both within the individual and in the environment, knowing that by working through this disturbance, painful as it may be both for the educator and the boy, growth eventually will happen. Challenging means not getting caught with order, discipline or uniformity; not trying to put people in one mould or creating clones; not allowing for mediocrity or lethargy to settle in; being convinced that youngsters need space to develop their potential for growth; believing that the person, if given the space and encouragement, has within himself the capacity to strive towards his highest calling.

There are basically two life forces. They are in opposition with each other, but they are not contradictory. On the one side we experience a drive for integration and closeness—a need to be welcomed into the life of another, be next to, held, connected with, become part of another, be comfortable. Simultaneously, in each of us, there is also a built-in urge for individuality—a need to be autonomous, to experience uniqueness, be independent, unique and different. These two life forces are in obvious tension with each other, and development involves addressing this tension and resolving it in favor of further growth. It is the role of the educator to challenge the youngster to face and not evade this tension which is a continuous process in life. Unsuccessful resolution of this tension would end up either making him ‘too emotionally attached’ and therefore

dependent, or ‘too independent’ and therefore individualistic. How a youngster navigates through this dual yearning for both closeness and a distinct self has consequences for his future orientation towards becoming an individual. This negotiation becomes crucial to the future exercise of creativity and originality, to an experience of vibrancy, brilliance, and adventure about life.

Healthy holding is absolutely essential before initiating the process of differentiation or separation. If the holding has been inappropriate—if an over-dependence has been created, or else the links between the youngster and the caretaker have been severed too abruptly—he will not be prepared to make the move towards differentiation. Differentiation is difficult, something is leaving, being lost. The person is moving from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium. There will naturally be some kind of resistance to surrender the comfort of feeling secure and move towards something that is new and unknown. But this needs to be done in order that the youngster does not remain ‘stuck’ in his embeddedness.

In general, in the way the Salesian system is practiced, robust challenging is not a common process. We either evade challenging another or do it in ways that sever relationships. We evade confronting because maintaining relationships and cultivating ‘family spirit’ are important aspects for us and we fear losing these elements if we challenge another. Consequently, we live together in ‘harmony’ without really making much progress in growth. Mediocrity and superficiality become the hallmarks of our life and we allow things to take their course rather than initiate expansion and growth. On the other hand, we sometimes challenge in a way that puts the other in a defensive mode and negates him as an individual, resulting in a souring of the relationship. The quality of confrontation that occurs is an index of the quality of relationship that really exists. If a relationship disintegrates because of confrontation, it is based on a false sense of cohesion. Of course, confrontation must always be made in a caring and respectful manner. It is a corrective feedback – an invitation for the other to look at some aspect of his life and determine whether he wants to make the changes suggested. When we avoid challenging another, we actually show we have no concern for the other’s growth.

### *5.3 Continuing*

Although development is an intrinsic part of our evolutionary motion, it is a painful and, in some sense, a frightening affair. Erikson speaks of developmental ‘crisis’ points which he described as moments of heightened potential and increased vulnerability.<sup>12</sup> Dis-identification with a given state or balance of development in favor of what has not yet emerged and consolidated is like being thrown into a no man’s land and left alone and helpless. This is the time a person would need a secure culture of embeddedness, which will not only challenge, contradict, or negate the current self-sense and securities, but also genuinely and convincingly stand by as the self negotiates the next stage of evolution. A reliable and supporting culture would make a real difference to the self as it differentiates and reintegrates, develops a new view of reality, experiments with a new sense of self, constructs a new moral stance, or tries out a different faith expression.

It is essential for the educator to ‘be around’ during the period of transformation and re-equilibrium that a youngster is trying to negotiate, so that what was a part of him

can gradually become not-him and he can successfully re-integrate into his becoming self. Growth is not only a matter of separation and repudiation, of killing off the past. It is more a matter of transition and reorganization. Growth involves the reconciliation, the recovery, the recognition and acceptance of that which before was confused with the self.

For the educator to disappear at exactly the time when the youngster is experiencing a loss of himself is to leave him with a kind of unrecoverable loss, a confirmation of his worst suspicions about the life project. The normal experiences of evolution involve recoverable loss; what we separate from we find anew. What becomes almost traumatic for the youngster is when, during the critical period of transition, either through a kind of psychological withdrawal or through actual physical loss, he experiences the absence of the educator. "It takes a special wisdom for the educator to understand that by remaining in place so that the adolescent can have him there even to ignore and reject, he is providing something very important, and is intimately and importantly involved in the child's development."<sup>13</sup>

This third and important factor of 'Continuing' or 'Being Around' is very poignantly brought out by Don Bosco's insistence on 'presence' and the quality of our presence with the boys. Don Bosco says: "It [presence] consists in making the prescriptions and regulations of an Institute known and then watching in such a way that the pupils have continually the vigilant eye of the Director or of the assistants on them, who as loving fathers speak, guide in every circumstance, advise, and lovingly correct."<sup>14</sup> 'Continuing' is related to the principle of assistance-presence of the educator during the whole period of the pupil's education; a presence that is neither police-like nor harassing, but friendly, encouraging and continuously growth promoting.

The adolescent period is a time of great transition and flux. A lot is taking place in the inner world of the youngster as he tries to negotiate and make the necessary changes to fit into the adult world. His outer self may project a sense of confidence and sometimes even arrogance. But within himself he is often unsure, hesitant, confused, and afraid. He has a very tentative self-image and is not sure of surviving in the adult world. He wants to try out new experiences, but is afraid of failure. He needs to know that he will not lose the respect of his companions and will not be held in disrepute by his mentors and guides. It is because of this that we need to assure the youngster that we will be there for him – not just when he is successful but also when he fails, not just when he is well-behaved but also when he goes astray. It is actually when he fails and goes astray that he needs all the more the assurance that he will not be forsaken. 'Being Around' is accompanying and the quality of our accompaniment will ultimately be the most deciding factor in the transformation of the adolescent into a mature adult. We need to reflect and see whether we are actually there for our youngsters especially at those important moments of their life transitions.

## **6. Conclusion**

In November 2004, the Bombay Archdiocesan Board of Education organized an 'Education Consult' for examining and understanding the impact of the education imparted by the 200-odd Catholic educational institutions of the Archdiocese of Bombay. An important realization at the Consult was that, although our institutions impart good knowledge in the sciences and arts to thousands of students, the majority of those who

pass out from our schools and colleges are unprepared to face the vicissitudes of life. What we see instead is that the present generation of youngsters is more troubled emotionally than their predecessors: they more lonely and depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and prone to worry, more impulsive and aggressive.

To tackle this unhealthy situation, one of the important decisions that was taken and which is already being implemented was to train an adequate number of counselors for imparting affective education in the institutions of the Archdiocese. “The emotional lessons taught to children shape their emotional circuits, making them more adept – or inept – at the basics of emotional intelligence. Childhood and adolescence are critical windows of opportunity for setting down the essential emotional habits that will govern the lives of these children in the future”.<sup>15</sup> With the stress and strain in family life, very little affective education is given in the homes nowadays. It therefore becomes almost mandatory that educational institutions take on this ever important task of ‘educating the heart.’

The Salesians of Don Bosco are a congregation actively involved in education and working with children and adolescents. We have a rich legacy from our father and founder Don Bosco who himself excelled in the art of affective education and insisted that ‘education of the heart’ should be the basis and foundation of all education. Educating the heart or *amorevolezza* was central to his system of education. Research shows us without doubt that emotional growth is both basic and essential for intellectual and spiritual growth.

In his System of Expression Don Bosco gave us all the important elements necessary to aid human growth. Reason, Religion and Loving-kindness are not just essential aspects in an educative process, they form an organic whole that can help a youngster arrive at his full potential. But while Reason is developed through a long process of academic studies for a number of years, and Religion has well-formulated catechetical programs along with sacramental aids to help one to arrive at an adequate level of spirituality, a program for ‘Educating the Heart’ is non-existent.

There is no syllabus or program for helping Salesians themselves grow in the affective aspect of their personhood and then also master the skills and methodologies necessary to aid those in their care. It is largely a list of ‘Do’s’ and ‘Don’ts’ that we give to ‘Salesians in formation’ who in turn churn out a longer list of dos and don’ts to the youngsters. Educating the heart is both an art and a science. It needs to be cultivated in a systematic and complete manner. We have to handle our own emotions in a healthy manner, so that we can understand the youth in our care, know what their needs are and avoid burdening them with our own unmet needs. We are living in a time where immense research and study is being done on the importance of emotional intelligence, and effective ways being devised for imparting this education to others. It would seem that we have not taken this development seriously enough. Little or no work is being done by us to understand how emotions develop, how they lead to certain behaviors, how to work with difficult emotions, and how to relate meaningfully and deeply with others. We need to bring emotional literacy to our schools and in our dealing with youngsters so that emotional learning becomes ingrained in them.

Certain emotional skills are basic. These include: self-awareness; identifying, expressing, and managing feelings; impulse control and delaying gratification; and handling stress and anxiety. Many competences are interpersonal: reading social and

emotional cues, listening, being able to resist negative influences, taking others' perspectives, and understanding what behavior is acceptable in a situation. Many skills are imbibed as we go along in life. But for these skills to become a source of strength to us in times of distress, we need systematic learning and assimilation. Churning our intellectual giants without adequate emotional skills would be disastrous.

Developmental psychologists and educators have been able to map the growth of emotions and be more specific about just what lessons children should be learning at each point in the unfolding of emotional intelligence, what the lasting deficits are likely to be for those who fail to master the right competencies at the appointed time, and what remedial experiences might make up for what was missed.

We need to attend to this task without delay. Maybe we need to set up an institute which will study the situation in the Indian context and devise methods and programs suitable for our conditions and needs. Accompanying youngsters on their journey to emotional maturity is our commitment as Salesians. Learning the art of *Confirming, Challenging and Continuing* at each stage of the youngsters' growth and being with him especially in his periods of transition is a skill we must all master if we are to effectively accompany them on their journey. As Salesians we could take the lead and draw up a program on affective growth and development both for the youth and for adults who deal with youth. It would be an immense contribution to the growth and development of the Church and the nation.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Bollettino Salesiano* n. 11 (November 1882) 179, as cited in Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience* (Rome: LAS, 1989) 67

<sup>2</sup> Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience* 136.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>4</sup> *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, ed. Eugenio Ceria (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1959) 4: 313.

<sup>5</sup> G.B. Lemoyne and A. Amadei, *Memorie Biographie* 10 (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1939) 1022.

<sup>6</sup> *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco* 4:264-265.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Rogers, *Psychology: A Study of a Science*. Vol 3: *Formulations of the Person and the Social Context*, ed. S. Koch (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959) 196.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham Mattakottil, *Quest for Freedom and Psychotherapy* (Place: Publisher, Year) 5.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982) 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 125-126.

<sup>12</sup> E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1968) 45.

<sup>13</sup> Kegan 129.

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù* (1877). Cf. Giovanni Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, introduction and critical texts ed. P. Braido, *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 4 (1985) 171-321.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995) xiv.