

Art. 10. The Pedagogy of Goodness

In their educational task, Salesian Cooperators:

§1. *put into practice Don Bosco's "Preventive System," a spiritual and educative experience which is based on Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness¹;*

§2. *foster a family environment in which constant dialogue, an animating presence, personal accompaniment, and group experience help all perceive God's presence;*

§3. *promote the good and educate to a love for life, to responsibility, solidarity, sharing, synergy, and communion;*

§4. *appeal to a person's inner resources and believe in the invisible action of grace. They look at each young person with realistic optimism, convinced of the educational value of the faith experience. Their relationship with the young is inspired by a mature and welcoming love.*

CONSIDERATIONS

Core themes

1. Putting into Practice the Preventive System
2. Fostering a Family Environment
3. Educating to a Love for Life
4. Appealing to a Person's Inner Resources

Keys to Understanding

"The educator is an individual consecrated to the good of his educandi; therefore, he must be ready to face every inconvenience and every labor so as to reach his goal: in other words, the civic, moral, and scientific education of his pupils." ("The Little Treatise on the Preventive System").

"It has only been a few days that I have been separated from you, my dear sons, and yet, it feels like many months have already passed. You truly are my delight and my consolation and I miss both of these two things when I am far from you." (Memorie Biografiche XVII 369 [sic])

A. Putting into Practice the Preventive System

The educator *is* the Preventive System. Such a statement might seem exaggerated, forced, and paradoxical. Still, it does not seem a stretch of the truth to state that Don Bosco's Preventive System is identified with the person of the educator, so great is the trust placed in him or her. The predominant function of the educator draws near to assuming the characteristics of a consecration – almost a Vocation. Education, therefore, is more than just one kind of work – it is a form of life because it does not "*produce*" material things but it "*constructs*" people who bear within themselves the gifts of plans, ideas, certainties,

¹ Giovanni Bosco. *The Preventive System in the Education of the Young*. Trans. Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco. 50-54. n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2013.
Pietro Braido, SDB. "[Il Sistema Preventivo in un 'Decalogo' per educatori.](#)" *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*. 4.1 (1985) 131-148. Print. (available in Italian only)

hopes, and a soul. It is required of the educator not only to be competent in pedagogy and relational abilities but also to live a precise identity.

- ***Standing alongside the young***

At the center of this system is the young person and his or her aspirations; at their side, however, stands the educator – totally available and ready to stand alongside them and take their part faithfully. Therefore, every act of education becomes, so to say, a "co-education"; not only in the sense of a "reciprocal education" between an adult and a young person but in a double sense – that both are called to participate in this "common" educative action. The young must become allies rather than simple listeners or recipients. They must be traveling companions and collaborators with the educators. The first task of the educator is, therefore, that of *being there*, of standing beside the young. The line of demarcation between the adults and the young is not very clear cut. The educator and the educandi are, to use a metaphor, in the same boat; if it sinks, they both drown. The educator does not find himself, to use another metaphor, on the sidelines of a game being played, nor can his role be reduced to that of an impartial referee. If the educand does not feel that he is being accompanied along his path to adulthood by the educator, he feels like he is "exposed to the four winds." If he does not have the security of believing that they are heading together towards his maturity, he becomes frightened.

- ***For building, not destroying***

The educator is always *personally implicated in the educative relationship*. The educator's personality, past, fears, and concerns have an impact on the educand. It is always and above all the person who educates. Preventive education does not exist except as a fruit of an encounter between persons who stand one in front of the other, totally present to each other. An authentic personal human relationship means that I am completely present to the other, that I am with him or her 100%, and that I take part in his or her personal existence because I care for and take interest in him or her. Young people quickly and easily realize if the educator is authentic in his actions – if they come from valid motivations and from deep convictions that constitute the very identity of the educator or not. Young people are not looking so much for a father or a mother who thinks of everything, who organizes their free time, who is a teacher concerned about the subject matter, or an adult who gives orders, much less the "judge" who threatens punishment. No. What they long for is the man or woman who is able to stand beside them and be more attentive to each one of them, individually, as a person, than to the generic demands of education, and someone who is ready and available to offer them a positive contribution to the development of their potential. Precisely in the measure in which the educator gives the young the feeling that they have the ability to value such potential, so will the way open to his or her being a proactive presence.

B. Educating to a Love for Life

- ***Education is a matter of the heart***

Love for life springs from the heart alone. Truth is not only a matter of the intellect. There is a truth about persons, about life, and about human relationships at the center of our being which we call "the heart." It is here that all the faculties of the person are rooted. Consequently, the Salesian Cooperator educator cannot limit him or herself to transmitting knowledge. He or she must put into motion those energies which lie hidden in the heart of the young lest they become confused or shrink from the task on

account of external pressures. It falls to the Cooperator and, even before him, to the parents, to set in motion and direct those *personal and community dynamics which can help this process along*.

- ***Love for life starts with the reunification of the subject***

Too often among *school, family, and parish* there exists a *schizophrenia* which impedes the ability of the young person to form a realistic image. This schizophrenia ends up fostering the illness to which many young people (but not only young people) are subject: *fragmentation of identity*. There exists an overabundance of opportunities, of stimuli, and of messages (which are often contradictory). The (young) person is incapable of making a critical evaluation or of creating a hierarchy in their regard. His vision of reality, even his identity, shatters and crumbles. This creates a profound sense of insecurity and a powerful identity crisis. *An interior center, a hinge, is missing* which would permit him to put himself back together and link together in a coherent manner all his experiences and plan his own personal history wisely.

Family, school, and parish possess the tools needed to respond to this crisis: *Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness*. These three words are the educative keys which illumine the mind, touch the heart, and get the feet moving – they are the keys to gather and unify many aspects of life, making its meaning spring up gradually along its different stages; otherwise, we risk creating baby adults who become adult babies. Just like Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperator commits himself to form mature and responsible persons in society and in the Church.

C. Appealing to the Inner Resources of the Person

The Preventive System requires of the educator to "get into the game" and to evaluate his personal convictions constantly – including those related to the problems of the young – living beside each young person, with a constant attitude of trust and not as a strict counselor or an inflexible judge. In particular, the educator is asked to become the very image of the values which he bears so as to prepare each young person to acquire the criteria necessary for making critical and informed choices as well as the tools which help them live serenely the moment when he must distance himself from them. Education seeks to produce in the young person an interior response and to raise up a commitment guaranteeing continuity, perseverance, and development for his whole life.

In summary: The educative efficacy of the Preventive System depends, before all else, on the quality of the educator's presence to his or her educand. The educator him or herself is the key to understand the educative action he or she carries out and situates in perfect harmony with his or her "travelling companion" who speaks the same language.

D. Fostering a Family Environment

With the preventive style, there tends to be created an interpersonal rapport between educandi and educator that is very close to that typical of the family, permitting exchange and understanding at the level of intimacy; there is, however, a code of rights and duties which is present by its very nature and is translated into an articulated distribution of roles and responsibilities.

- *Father, friend, brother (as well as Mother, friend, sister – no intention to exclude)*

a) Above all, the educator practices *fatherhood*, which equates to one of the roles recognized as essential by psychology: that of being the authority figure and the role model. For the child and for the preadolescent, the adult-educator remains the pole of attraction in great part; for the adolescent and the youth, he represents, instead, the dialectic pole in redefining his own personal identity. The educator is also the “arena” of confrontation for the educand’s ideas and the impetus to understand himself better through dialogue and exchange. In the Preventive System, there is no “alibi” of spontaneity, of permissiveness, or of a presumed respect for childish candor, but neither does it opt for an authoritarianism which is also destructive. The educator does not abdicate his personal responsibility, delegating to others his duties or remaining in a situation which fluctuates between a feeble attempt at making proposals and a tendency to impose them. For his authority to have credibility to a young person, he cannot put aside his role of father by seeking the affection of the young through avoiding telling them uncomfortable truths. Education is hard work!

b) Fatherhood must be linked with *friendship* and *fraternity*. Don Bosco asks the educator to be both friend and brother at the same time, inasmuch as he knows that inside the young person is a fundamental need for communication, friendship, and feeling important. The two friends/conversants thus find themselves in a sort of equal and fraternal friendship. If the father commands and dominates, the brother, and even more the friend, does not. In the one-on-one encounter between friends, which is conducted by the educator in such a way as to be able to make a correct diagnosis of the young person's difficulty, they go *together* to an examination of the means and of the ways to a solution. The conclusion on the part of the young person will be a commitment to a new phase of life in the company of the friend-educator who is present among the young, sharing in their recreation, their work, their love for life, and the proper "explosion" of their youthful energies: physical, intellectual, emotional, moral – in everything – including their sufferings.

- *Pre-existing condition*

Creating the conditions necessary to establish a willing relationship of cooperation and of "walking together" is one of the most delicate aspects of this issue. On the part of the educator – father-friend-brother – there needs to be an "acceptance" and a "being accepted"; analogously, on the part of the young person, he or she needs to permit him or herself to do his part. Therefore, a two-pole pedagogical acceptance is established: "paternal, fraternal, and friendly comprehension" on the part of the educator who takes interest in the young person, on the one hand, and "acceptance" of the educative intervention and of the person who does so on the part of the young person. On the part of the educator, the starting point is the unconditional acceptance of the young as they are and not as he wishes they would be. It is an acceptance that is created at the level of being and not of having: "It is enough that you are young," wrote Don Bosco "that I love you very much." Along with this, the educator is asked to furnish himself with goodness, to exclude every animosity and personal “touchiness”, and to acknowledge that objective and subjective difficulties may co-exist even with authentic goodwill within young people. But the young person, too, must also accept the educator and his intervention in accordance with an ensemble of motives: reasonableness and rationality, authority and fear, personal ascendancy and fascination. To be able to do this, the young person must overcome a number of psychological defense mechanisms because the future good brings along with it the cost of renouncing things that give immediate gratification.

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from “The Preventive System In the Education of The Young” by St. John Bosco

On a number of occasions I been have asked to express, verbally or in writing, a few thoughts concerning the so-called Preventive System which we are accustomed to use in our houses. Until now I have not been able to comply with this wish for lack of time, but since at the present moment we are preparing to print the regulations which now have been observed as it were by tradition, I have thought fit to give here an outline of it, which however will serve as a sketch for a small work which I am preparing, if God will give me life enough to be able to complete it. I do this solely to help in the difficult art of the education of the young. Therefore I will say: in what the Preventive System consists, and why it should be preferred; its practical application, and its advantages.

I: In what the Preventive System consists, and why it should be preferred.

Through the ages there have been two systems used in the education of the young: preventive and repressive. The repressive approach consists in making the law known to the students and then supervising them in order to detect transgressions, inflicting, wherever necessary, the merited punishment. Using this system the words and the appearance of the Superior must always be severe, and somewhat menacing, and he himself must avoid all friendly relationships with his dependants.

To give greater weight to his authority, the Director would need to be seen but rarely among his subjects, and generally speaking only when it was a question of punishing or threatening. This system is easy, less demanding and is especially useful in the army and among adult and sensible people who ought of themselves to know and remember what is according to the law and other regulations.

Quite otherwise, I would say its very opposite, is the preventive system. It consists in making known the rules and regulations of an Institute, and then supervising in such a way that the students are always under the vigilant eye of the Director and the assistants, who like loving fathers will converse with them, act as guides in every event, counsel them and lovingly correct them, which is as much as to say, will put the students into a situation where they cannot do wrong.

This system is all based on reason, religion and loving-kindness. Because of this it excludes every violent punishment, and tries to do without even mild punishments. It seems that this system is preferable for the following reasons:

1: Being forewarned, the pupil is not disheartened when he does something wrong, as happens when such things are reported to the one in charge. Nor does he get angry from being corrected, or threatened with punishment, or even from actually being punished, because there has always been through the affair a friendly voice forewarning him, which reasons with him and generally manages to win his friendship, so that the pupil knows there must be a punishment, and almost wants it.

2: The basic reason (why young people get into trouble) is youthful fickleness which in a moment can forget the rules of discipline and the punishments they threaten. For this reason, a child often commits a fault and deserves punishment, to which he had not given a thought, which he did not remember at all in the act of committing the fault, and which he certainly would have avoided had a friendly voice warned him.

3: The Repressive system can stop a disorder, but only with difficulty can it improve offenders. One observes that young people do not forget the punishments they have suffered, and generally remain embittered, wanting to throw off the yolk, and even to take revenge. It seems at times they pay no heed, but anyone who follows them up in later life knows that the recollections of the young are dreadful, and that they forget the punishments inflicted by their parents, but with great difficulty those given by their teachers. Episodes are known of some who in their old age have exacted an ugly revenge for certain punishments justly inflicted during their school days. On the other hand, the Preventive system makes a friend of the student, who in the assistant sees a benefactor who gives him good advice, wants to make him good, to shield him from unpleasantness, from punishment, from dishonour.

4: The Preventive system offers the student previous warning, in a way that the educator can still speak to him in the language of the heart, whether during the time of his education, or later. The educator, having won the loving respect of his protégé, will be able to greatly influence him, warn him, counsel him, and also correct him, even when he is employed, whether it be in the civil service, or in commerce. For these and many other reasons it seems that the preventive system should prevail over the repressive.

II: Application of the Preventive System

The practice of this system is all based on the words of St Paul, who says: “Love is patient, love is kind ... it bears all things ... hopes all things, endures all things”. (I Cor. 13:4.7 *passim*) Love is kindly, and patient; it puts up with all things, but hopes all things and endures any disturbance. For this reason only a Christian can successfully apply the Preventive system. Reason and Religion are the means the educator should constantly make use of, teaching them, making use of them himself, if he wishes to be obeyed and to attain his goal.

1: For this reason the Director should be dedicated to his pupils, nor should he ever assume tasks that would take him away from his duties; on the contrary, he should be among his pupils every time they are not taken up with other legitimate tasks, unless they are duly assisted by others.

2: The teachers, the technical instructors, the assistants should all be of known moral rectitude. They should try to avoid like the plague every kind of (morbid) affection or exclusive friendship with the pupils, and they should realise that the wrongdoing of just one person can compromise an educational Institute.

They should operate in a way that the students are never alone. As far as possible the assistants should precede them to the place where they are required to assemble; they should remain with them until others come to assist them; they should never allow them to be idle.

3: Give them ample liberty to jump, run, make a din as much as they please. Gymnastics, music, declamation (of poems, etc.), theatricals, hikes, are very effective methods for getting discipline; they favour good living and good health. One must only ensure that the plot, the characters and the dialogue are not unsuitable. That great friend of youth, St Phillip Neri used to say, "Do whatever you wish; for me it is enough you do not sin".

4: Frequent Confession, frequent Communion, daily Mass are the pillars that ought to support an educational edifice, from which one would want to keep at bay threats and violence. Never require the youngsters to go to the Holy Sacraments, but just encourage them, and offer them every opportunity to make good use of them. Then on the occasion of retreats, novenas, homilies, religious instructions, one should highlight the beauty, the greatness, the holiness of that Religion which proposes with such easy methods things as useful to civil society, to peace of heart, to the salvation of one's soul, as are these holy sacraments. In this way the young people will become involved spontaneously in these religious practices, with pleasure and with fruit.²

5: Exercise the strictest vigilance to prevent there being allowed in the Institute friends, books or persons who carry on bad conversations. The appointment of a good doorkeeper constitutes a treasure for a house of education.

6: Every evening after the usual prayers, and before the students go to bed, the Director, or someone in his place should offer a few kind words in public, giving some good advice or counsel regarding things to be done or avoided, and let him try to glean these from events that have taken place that day in the Institute or outside. But his talk should never go on more than two or three minutes. This is the key to good behaviour, progress and educational success.

7: Avoid like the plague the opinion of any one who would want to postpone First Holy Communion to too old an age, when most times the devil has taken possession of the heart of a youngster with incalculable harm to his innocence. According to the discipline of the early Church it was customary to give to infants the consecrated Hosts left over from the Easter Communion. This helps us realise how much the Church loves to see children admitted to their First Communion in due time. Once a child can tell the difference between Bread and bread, and shows himself to be sufficiently instructed, pay no attention to his age and let the Heavenly King come to reign in that happy soul.

8: Catechisms recommend frequent Communion. St Phillip Neri advised receiving once a week, or even more frequently. The Council of Trent states clearly that it greatly wishes every faithful Christian to also receive Communion each time he goes to Mass. But this communion should not only be spiritual but

² Not long ago a minister of the Queen of England, visiting an Institute in Turin was taken to a large hall where about 500 boys were studying. He was not a little amazed at seeing so many children in perfect silence, with no supervision. His amazement grew even more when he came to know that perhaps in an entire year, one did not have to complain of a word being said out place, or so much as threaten a punishment, much less inflict one. "Tell me, how ever is it possible to obtain such silence and such discipline", he asked. And he added to his secretary, "Write down whatever he says". "Sir", replied the Director of the establishment, "the means we use is not available to you." "Why?" "Because they are secrets known only to Catholics". "What are they?" "Frequent Confession and Communion, and Daily Mass well heard." "You are absolutely right. We lack these powerful means of education." "If you do not make use of these religious means, you must turn to threats and the stick". "You are right! You are right! Religion or the rod, I want to recount this in London".

in fact sacramental, so that one may gain greater benefit from this august and divine sacrifice. (Council of Trent, session XXII, ch. VI)

III. Utility of the Preventive System

Someone might say that this system is difficult in practice. I reply that from the point of view of the students it turns out easier, more satisfying, more advantageous. In the case of the educator, it does include some difficult features, which however are diminished if the educator addresses the task with devotion. An educator is one devoted to the well-being of his students, and for this reason ought to be ready to face every inconvenience, every fatigue in order to achieve his goal, which is the civil, moral and intellectual education of his students.

Over and above the advantages set out above, I would also add:

1: The student will have the greatest respect for the educator and will go on recalling with pleasure the orientation he was given, always considering his teachers and the other Superiors as fathers and brothers. Wherever they go, these students are generally the consolation of their families, useful citizens and good Christians.

2: Whatever might be the character, the attitude, the moral state of a pupil at the time he is enrolled, his parents can be secure in the knowledge that their son will not deteriorate, and one may confidently assert that one will achieve some improvement. Indeed, certain youngsters who for a long time were the scourge of their parents, and were even refused entry into houses of correction, when cared-for according to these principles, changed their attitude, their character, they set themselves to live a decent life, and now fill honourable places in society, thus becoming the support of their families, and a credit to the area they live in.

3: Pupils having unfortunate habits who perchance should gain entry into an Institute will not be able to harm their fellows, nor will good boys be harmed by them, because there will be neither time, place, or opportunity, insofar as the assistant, whom we presume to be present, would rapidly put things right.

A Word on Punishments

What criteria should one observe when inflicting punishment? Where possible, one should not make use of punishments, but when necessity demands repression, one should bear in mind the following:

1: The educator at work amongst his pupils should make himself loved, if he wishes to be respected. In this case the omission of an act of goodwill is a punishment, but a punishment that acts as a challenge, encourages, and never disheartens.

2: With the young, what is used as a punishment becomes a punishment. One can observe that a less-than-loving look is for some worse than being struck. Praise when something is done well, blame when there is negligence, are already reward and punishment.

3: Except in very rare cases, corrections, punishments should never be given in public, but privately, apart from companions, and one should use the greatest prudence and patience to have the student understand his fault through reason and religion.

4: To strike one in any way, to make one kneel in a painful position, to pull any one's ears and similar punishments should be absolutely avoided, because they are forbidden by the law of the land, they greatly irritate the young, and they degrade the educator.

5: The Rector should make the rules well known, along with the rewards and punishments set down in the disciplinary policy, so that no pupil might be able to excuse himself by saying he did not know what was commanded or forbidden

If in our houses this system is put into practice I believe that we will be able to achieve excellent results without resorting either to corporal punishment, nor to other violent punishments. For these forty years during which I have dealt with the young, I do not remember ever having used any kind of punishment, and with the help of God I have always got not only what was necessary, but even had my wishes met, and that from those same young people for whom every hope of a good outcome seemed in vain.

(Fr.) John Bosco

from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator

Education is a matter of the heart (Project of Apostolic Life, 10)

The truth is not only an intellectual question. There is a truth about persons, about life, about human relationships, at the center of our being that is called heart. Here is where all of a person's faculties are rooted. Consequently, an educator cannot limit himself to handing down "knowledge." He must put into motion the secret energies of the hearts of his students lest they allow themselves to be confused and worn out by or to shrink before the tricks of the enticements that come from the outside.

It's the teacher's job, and even before him, the parents', to set in motion the personal and communal dynamics which can develop this process. Only a teacher who is able to witness and to communicate this profound dynamism is able to merit the name of "master," and to enjoy that authority which belongs to a docent.

The re-unification of the subject (Project of Apostolic Life, 10)

Too often among school, family, and parish there exists a schizophrenia which impedes the young person from gaining a realistic image. This schizophrenia ends up favoring that sickness to which many young people today (and not just the young) are subject; i.e., the shattering of one's identity. There is an excess of opportunities, of stimuli, and of messages (often contradictory). The young person is unable to give a critical evaluation to them and to construct a hierarchy for them. Their vision of reality, but also of their identity, crumbles, breaks apart. This creates a profound sense of insecurity, a strong identity crisis. They lack an inner center, a hinge, which permits them to reassemble and join together their experiences in a coherent way and to plan their own life with wisdom.

Family, school, and parish have the tool needed to respond to this personal crisis: Reason – Religion – Loving-kindness. These three words compose the one educative key which illumines the mind, touches the heart, and puts hands in motion; the one key which gathers and unifies the diverse aspects of life, making its meaning gush forth. This must happen gradually, along the various seasons of life, otherwise

we risk having children-adults who will become adult-children. Like Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperator is committed to forming mature and responsible persons both in society and in the Church.

Educators, and parents like educators, are the formators of the young who, in their turn, are builders. These formators insert the young into the dynamic practices of both the Christian community and of society. No longer can an educator only “propose” religious or social values so as to give meaning to life, but he must be a “master,” immersed in the dynamic nature of his historical reality. A Christian can never skip over history. The Salesian Cooperator not only does not skip over history, but he effectively takes on the task to orient it to Christ. At this point, we are permitted to ask: “What must we do as individual Cooperators and as an Association?”

- Profoundly re-think our civilization. This is no small task, but we are convinced that only a new education can do this. The tragedy of our educational system is that it no longer gives reference points to our youth which are able to help them orient their own lives and that of society. Therefore, it is necessary and urgent to get a true “cultural revolution” under way, one which fosters the passage from the static-sacral world to the historical-dynamic world, on which the fate of humanity rests.

- Individual commitment alone is insufficient. The new education is a symphony which must be executed by an orchestra. And the orchestra is, in this case, the men and women who, like the Cooperators, are asked to find inside themselves educative passion, all difficulties notwithstanding. This is what their vocation and their mission are. God has created man not only so that he might be good, but so that he might cooperate with Him and be a leading actor of history.

To educate means to help the new generations become leading actors of their history. The primary goal of education – as Pope Benedict XVI reminded us – is “the formation of the person so as to enable him to live in fullness *and to make his own contribution to the good of the community.*”

Fidelity to Don Bosco requires that the social and apostolic action of the Salesian Cooperators be directed in a preferential way to the poor youth of the big cities (especially those of the outskirts of the city where they are most abandoned), to the young workers, to the young who are non-believers in countries that are Christian by tradition, and to under-developed areas where poverty and abandonment are most evident.