



INSIGHT
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Blessed are those who show loving kindness!

for fear of its legal consequences. However, it is sad to bear in mind that we have grudgingly given up beating but not the system that it is part of. The entire system of education needs a paradigm shift from the discipline of rules and punishments to the discipline of love and care. We do not realize that not loving a child or student is the worst punishment that we can give to them. The biggest and lasting formative influence on our children and students is that we love them genuinely.

Our world today sees more and more nuclear families (in contrast to the extended families in times gone by). This often means that individuals in a family do not get sufficient love, understanding, affection, and interaction with their siblings and relatives. There are opportunities for choosing to do more sophisticated degrees, but unfortunately we have students who can hardly adjust themselves to the needs and expectations of other students and the environment. We realize that working parents do not have time for their children even if they wish to do so. And, even in cases where they have time, they do not feel confident to correct them for fear of losing them. Students may not realize that what they need is love and understanding. In such a confused state of mind and heart, they are deprived of the capacity for dreaming dreams that really matter. Educators are invited to help them and rekindle in them their capacity to dream. If needed, even dream with them.

One of the greatest educators of Italy in the 19th century undoubtedly was St. John Bosco, a simple and dynamic priest of the archdiocese of Turin. The genius of the man was to base his system of education on 'loving kindness' or amorevolezza as it is expressed in Italian. He knew from the very beginning that fear, control, strict rules and regulations would not help young persons to grow in freedom and responsibility. It goes without saying that loving kindness would remain the key factor that would determine the educational scenario of the future. In this sharing I would like to interpret 'loving kindness' as 'emotional guidance and accompaniment'.

Among the various intelligences, that we are expected to cultivate in the students, emotional intelligence receives prime importance. While the other intelligences like, intellectual, spiritual, social, ecological do matter in the growth of an individual, what concretely touch the individual's growth continues to be loving kindness, which demands emotional guidance and accompaniment. We who have been used to the tradition and principle: 'spare the rod and spoil the child' will find the system of Don Bosco rather difficult and irksome.

Generally, beating the students and children has stopped





i) Personal Conflict in Relationship:

We, already, see the signs of the inability of students to cope with personal, family and social conflicts. Anger, anxiety and outbursts of violence are expressions of a need for genuine understanding and love. Only an educative ambient jointly fostered by parents, educators, students, can give an adequate response to such an inability. The conflict arises first and foremost from the individual himself or herself to assert his or her individuality and the freedom to decide. It also arises from the unreasonable expectations and demands of the parents or guardians; and, from the educational institutions' concern for survival. All the above lead to policies in decision-making which promote students by competition rather than collaboration. The alluring opportunities offered by society at large is another contributing factor to the incapacity of the children to choose.

Any sign of dependence on someone, even if he or she is the most loving person (father, mother, friend, teacher), sooner or later will lead to personal conflicts. Students like to retain their freedom to choose and decide as their birth-right. They are certainly happy to receive advice, suggestions and ideals presented to them; but, it goes without saying that individuals would like to retain their freedom to personalize them. This is one of the most difficult areas of loving kindness. It is difficult for the educator to love without making the students dependent. Loving kindness must be interpreted in this context as an empowering accompaniment and not dependency-creating caring.

ii) The Need for Affection and Understanding:

Young people would like to be loved and appreciated for what they are and for what they do. Affection and

understanding needs to be interpreted as respecting their uniqueness. Any comparison with other students, however constructive it might appear to the educator like presenting models, would appear as a sign of non-acceptance. This becomes even more challenging in an educational scenario where performance is the criterion of success and promotion and ranking is the way of securing one's place in society.

Presence can be considered the key aspect in the system of Don Bosco. Though it is true that presence makes all the difference, it has come under the critical eye of psychologists and educators. Presence, which is a sign of our love and affection for the students, could be perceived by the students as suffocating and curtailing their free growth.

iii) A Loving and an Educative Ambience:

When our educational institutions are perceived by students and parents as places which grant degrees and diplomas – a return on the time and money they invest - it is difficult to make them into an ambient for the integral growth of the students. Business-like relationships are spontaneously fostered in the present scenario.

The Salesian educator is invited in this context to create a loving and formative ambient where students spontaneously feel that they belong there, and such an ambient is conducive for their all-round growth. This becomes tedious for the educator since the conflicting expectations of the stake holders prevents him from creating a loving ambient. The educator has to be inventive and creative to make the students feel that there is more to education than just to obtain a degree. Education is a preparation for life with all its many facets and dimensions. The 'head', the 'heart' and the 'hands' all have a place in building good human persons with good values.