

The Process of Empowerment in the Pedagogy of Don Bosco

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Abstract

The preventive system of Don Bosco is an art of education in the formation of young people. As against the repressive system the preventive system empowers the person. The end of education is the empowerment of the person. The process of Empowerment is the integral education and formation of the person. Empowering education is possible only with an empowered educator and empowering pedagogy.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process. Youth empowerment refers to activities, both with and for the youth that is intended to reduce the level of dependency and to build the capability to handle one's own life and its demands.

This article discusses the process of empowerment in the pedagogy of Don Bosco. Later the article discusses how the educator and the pedagogy of Don Bosco achieves this empowerment process. The pedagogy of Don Bosco is person-centred. Knowledge, skills and values empower the person and involve the student and educator in encountering loving and caring communion with each other. The heart of education is the person.

Introduction

Don Bosco was a doer. He was an educator before he was an educationist. He had written little, but he had experimented with youth and used the education he gave them, to effect and change the lives of his students. (Morrison p.140) As a father he was ever present with them, which he called 'assistance'. His assistance as a loving presence of a loving father whose continued presence foresaw problems before they arose and prevented many mishaps was rightly called by him '*Preventive System*'. The effective implementation of his educative pedagogy required that teaching be an art, that is, the. Educator was to be treated as 'teacher-artist'. No wonder Don Bosco conceived education itself as an art: "Education is the great art of forming human beings" (Morrison 2009:146)

Education is a powerful tool for empowerment of the individual. It is intrinsic to human personality. It carries both intrinsic as well as instrumental values. Education involves imparting or acquiring knowledge through which the powers of reasoning and judgment can be developed and thus prepare people intellectually and integrally to achieve maturity in life (Chakalackal 2006:145).

Empowerment is a Process – a multi-dimensional process (Vavrus& Fletcher 2006). Working with young people is described in different terminologies such as 'youth work', 'youth service', 'youth welfare', 'youth development', 'youth empowerment', etc. Though these terms are inter-changeably used, yet each term is different from the other. Youth empowerment is referred to activities both with and for the youth that is intended to reduce the level of dependency and to build capability to handle one's own life and its demands.

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Empowerment is not mere reduction of dependency or increase of self-sufficiency; it further strengthens the capacity to meet life challenges. (Malcom Payne 2009)

Empowering Process in Preventive System

There are two systems which have been in use through all ages in the education of youth: The Preventive and the Repressive. The Repressive System consists in making the law known to the subjects, and afterwards watching to discover the transgressors of these laws, and inflicting, when necessary, the punishments deserved. The Preventive System, on the contrary, makes a friend of the pupil, who looks upon his educator as a benefactor who advises him, wishes to make him good, to save him from trouble, from punishments, and from dishonor. The educator having once succeeded in gaining the heart of his subject can afterwards exercise a great influence over him, can caution, advise and even correct him, although he may already occupy some position in the world.

Braido (2013) states that the idea of education as prevention is not new. Historically education was already considered as preventive education whether it used repressive or preventive methods. Through education the government can prevent crimes and assure its citizens a peaceful state. Good governance can be achieved only with a great educational programme. Families unable to provide their children with right education cannot prevent their children from vices and immorality and safeguard them and protect them from many physical and moral dangers and provide them with the opportunities. Special care needs to be taken in reforming and re-organizing the education of the poor.

Person Centered Education

Student-centered instruction [SCI] is an instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. This learning model places the student (learner) in the center of the learning process. The instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skills they need to do so effectively. The SCI approach includes such techniques as substituting active learning experiences for lectures, assigning open-ended problems and problems requiring critical or creative thinking that cannot be solved by following text book examples, involving students in simulations and role plays, and using self-paced and/or cooperative (team-based) learning. Properly implemented SCI can lead to increased motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes towards the subject being taught (Collins & O'Brien, 2003).

Empowering education is student-centered and employs critical and democratic pedagogy for studying any subject matter and for Knowledge, Skills, Values and social change. The teachers and students mutually investigate academic knowledge and social issues through dialogue and problem-posing, in which students become active agents of their learning.

The preventive system was free from pressure and disciplinary measures from outside. It was not extrinsic force. It was from within. It was an intrinsic in the sense that guidance, correction, counseling and continuous presence and accompaniment of the educator and the loving and caring relation between the educator and the educated allowed a significant freedom. The Preventive system aimed at being free from outside enforcement and allowed for more educational freedom from within. As the family environment where teachers were accepted as brothers, friends and fathers, the students enjoyed communion and not isolation and anxiety, which created a free environment. Don Bosco wanted to influence them from within. (Morrison2009:148)

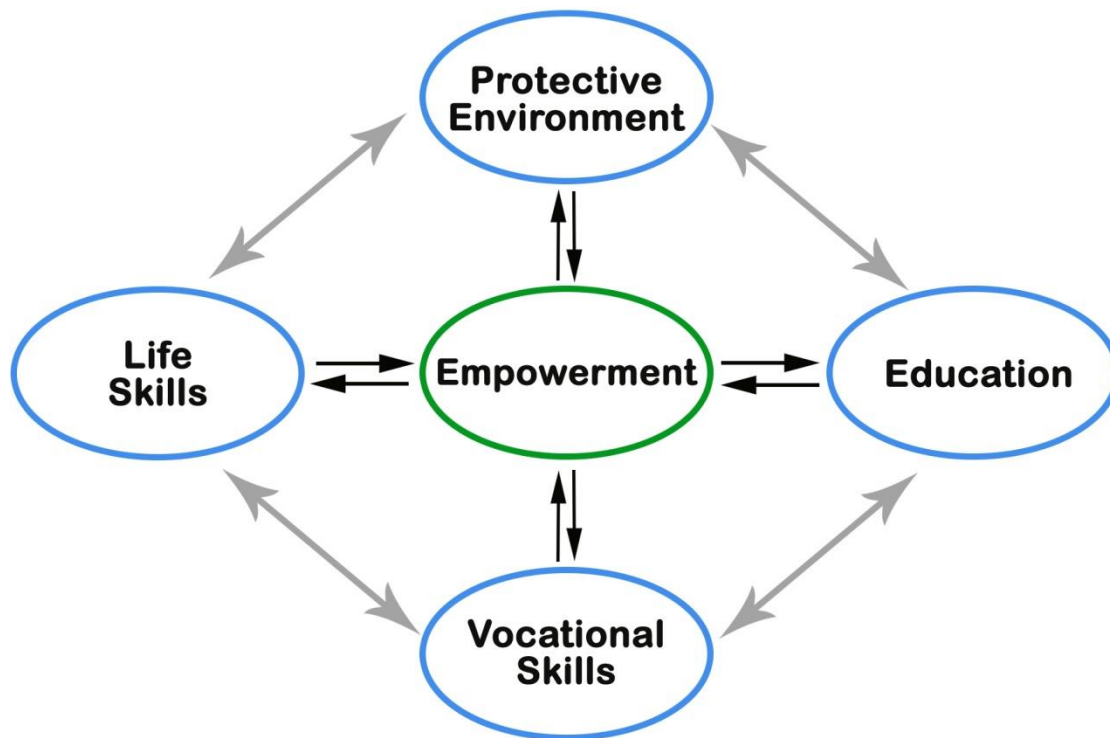


Figure: 1 Dimensions of Empowerment of Marginalized Youth (Jeyarayan 2014:29)

The above figure explains the dynamic process of empowerment of not only the marginalized youth but of any youngster. The content of empowering education can also be inferred. Don Bosco in his pedagogy assured this. He ensured an environment which moulded the person and enhanced growth and development of the whole person. He was not satisfied with mere knowledge, but also skills and values.

Empowering Environment of Presence

Don Bosco was involved in the education of his students from 1847. His concept of ‘presence’ of the Salesian teachers during ‘assistance’ was encouraging ‘social contacts’ and ‘interaction’ among the educators and the educands. Don Bosco had weekly meetings with his staff to discuss pedagogical problems, the education of his students and sought solutions on a harmonious and friendly basis. His pupils knew that he cared for them. He was a father interested in their welfare. Pupils regarded their teachers in the same light. (Morrison 2009:152)

Let the boys have full liberty to run, skip and play as much as they please. Gymnastics, music, reciting, acting and hikes are most efficacious means of promoting discipline and improving good conduct and health; care, however, must be taken that the games, the persons who take part in them, and the conversations held, are irreproachable. ‘Do anything you like,’ the great Saint of youth, St. Philip, used to say, ‘as long as you do not sin.’

Provide an environment of reinforcement, good modelling and constructive feedback- physical, intellectual and emotional and social growth.(Eccles, J. and Gootman, J.A, (2002:96). An Empowering Environment is an environment that provides young people with core components that are needed for successful development and engagement. The core components include:

1. Opportunities for positive relationships with peers and adults.
2. Opportunities for skill building and competency development.
3. Opportunities for meaningful engagement in one’s development and their community development.

(Perkins 2009:109)

Anti-oppressive Practice

Anti-oppressive Practice is a key principle of work with young people. Oppression is not the misuse of personal power by an individual, or personal instances of discrimination, prejudice and inequality. But it is a system of deeply ingrained attitudes and practices. It is a collective power and ability of some groups in society

to exclude, deny, control and define other groups and those people who belong to those groups. (Chouhan 1993:63)

Opportunities for Growth and Development

1. Opportunities for Positive Relationships: Non-judgmental love and mentoring are the characteristics of caring relationships of non-parental adults. Provide an environment of reinforcement, good modelling and constructive feedback- physical, intellectual and emotional and social growth. (Perkins 2009:110)

2. Opportunities for Skill Building and Competency Development: There are four dimensions of person that need to be empowered. They are: physical health, cognitive development, psychological/emotional development and social development. Lerner (2004) presents the five Cs that needs to be nurtured in the empowering environment.

1. **Competency** in cognitive, social, emotional and vocational skills: These involve logical and analytic thinking, problem solving, decision making, interpersonal skills, such as communication, assertiveness, and conflict resolution.
2. **Confidence** is improving one's self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, identity and belief in the future.
3. **Connectedness** to self and others is developing and strengthening relationships with other people and institutions, such as faith or belief based and value-based organizations and schools.
4. **Character** that comes from positive values, integrity, and a strong sense of morals which involves self-discipline, respect for cultural or societal rules and standards and a sense of right and wrong(morality) and a sense of God(spirituality).
5. **Caring** and compassion is in improving the empathetic skills so that the young person not only feels for but feels with the fellow human being. (Lerner 2004)
6. **Contribution:** The young people too should be given opportunities to contribute to their families, communities, neighbourhoods, to exercise the above qualities.(Perkins 2009:111)

3. Opportunities for Meaningful Engagement and Voice: Opportunities for participation, contribution, and engagement enable young people to address developmental needs such as a sense of generosity, sense of mastery and sense of belonging. The young person becomes efficacious when he/she gets the opportunity to make a difference in their social world. Young people discover their skills, talents, and interests because they have opportunities for problem-solving, decision making and working together. It is a chance for them to exercise their 'voice' and 'choice'. (Perkins 2009:112) Young people making contributions are reframing their self-perceptions as well as adult's perceptions of them. From being a problem and recipient of services, they

become a resource and provider of services (Bernard 2004). Social engagements help realize a sense of generosity and self-worth and help overcome egocentric thinking and behavior (Werner and Smith 1992).

The empowering environment should be target-driven with multi-faceted formation: This should include aspects of personal development, dealing with relevant issues of the young people (Yates 2009:178). This includes handling the risks that these young people are likely to encounter and preparing them to meet the challenges of life situations. The physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions are paid attention to in the empowering environment.

Don Bosco often repeated that the boys must not only be **loved**, but they must know that they are loved (Ceria 2002:88). Don Bosco wrote in the first Constitutions, “An educator should seek to win the **love** of his pupils, if he wishes to inspire fear in them. If possible do not make use of **punishment** but prevent it through Salesian presence and assistance (Lemoyne 2003:384).

Empowering Educators

“The **job of education** was to develop character in the broadest sense i.e., principles, thought and action, in which the dignity of man was manifested”, (Scheffler 1967:130). Don Bosco’s pedagogy is **not a theory but a practice** and a way of life to be lived. The methodology involves the educator and the educand in communion and encounters of reason and kindness, the objective being the attainment of the physical, aesthetic, intellectual, civic, moral and religious education of youth. (Morrison 2009:168)The educator must strive to make himself loved by his pupils, if he wishes to obtain their respect. When he succeeds in doing this, the omission of some token of kindness is a punishment which rekindles emulation, revives courage and never degrades.

Act like a caring father. You will obtain anything from your children if they realize that you are seeking their own good. Act towards them as a good father who checks his children only from a sense of duty, when reason and justice clearly require it. Be gentle and prudent. God will surely reward you if you are persevering in these virtues. He will make you the master of your children’s hearts even when they are stubborn and rebellious. When the pupil is convinced that his superiors have high hopes for him, he is drawn back again to the practice of virtue. A kind word or a glance does more to encourage a child than a severe reprimand, which only serves to dampen youthful enthusiasm. A fatherly word in private is worth much more than reproach. Instill in the young the desire of reward or the thought of doing honor to their dear ones. In this way they are at times incited to acts of great generosity. If they fall into the same faults repeatedly, without losing sight of charity, warn them in more serious terms, contrasting your own conduct towards them with theirs towards you. Show them how concerned you are to save them from trouble and how little they repay your leniency toward them.

Never, as far as possible, correct in public, but in private, apart from others Many times an indirect method of correcting is useful. For example, while in the presence of one at fault, speak to another about the folly of those who do lose their self-respect and good sense and so deserve punishment. Sometimes, to obtain the amendment of our pupils it is enough to withdraw those marks of confidence and friendliness usually shown them. Give time to reflect, to enter into one-self, to realize one`s mistake.

Educators' capacity to build Trust and Rapport

One should have 'Staff with the ability to build up a rapport with often quite difficult individuals, to facilitate the developmental process' (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Scott Yates (2009:182) explains that establishing an effective, trusting relationship with young people is an ongoing process involving attention, sensitivity and appropriate responses to their experiences, needs and opinions. It is important to establish trust and rapport. Characteristics most conducive to establishing trust and rapport are flexibility of working, and an engaged, non-judgmental approach. It is important to respect young people's sensitivity to intrusion, to keep promises, provide accurate and appropriate information, and act and present oneself in an appropriate manner that enables young people to feel at ease.

Environment of Socio-Emotional Support

The importance of an environment of socio-emotional support for children to grow and develop is crucial to their development and growth. Close relationships with caring, supportive adults are critical, particularly today, when most parents work and the extended family is often lacking. Thus, teachers and care givers are urged to provide young people with opportunities to participate in decisions that relate to their concerns, interests and work. It makes them believe that they are being treated fairly, their input is valued and used, their best interests are being taken into account and their needs are being regarded and respected (Whistler 1991:26).

Spiritual Environment

Spiritual Dimension of Education is the unique contribution of Indian culture. Educators should give abiding spiritual and intellectual assistance to youth and create an awareness of the transcendental being. When there is a spiritual void in the young people, they search for substitutes such as cult of the body, drug addiction, that makes them victims of consumerism and materialism, etc. Such tendencies can be countered and curtailed by providing effective spiritual initiation to the young minds by the educators (Menampambil 2006:149).When there is a spiritual void in the person, they search for substitutes: the cult of the body, drug escape, possession of material goods, etc. (Amarnad 2006: 245). Don Bosco was able to fill the void in his pedagogy.

Integral Education in the Pedagogy of Don Bosco

The preventive system takes care of all the essential aspects of education. It speaks of **four major dimensions** of the human person. Doss and Fernando (2011) summarize the following dimensions as:

1. The **human** aspect, which consists in a person's intellectual, psychological, physical and cultural formation.
2. The **spiritual** aspect, that takes care of his spiritual and religious dimensions.
3. **Social** aspect that makes a person community oriented and helps overcome individualism, in order to become a communicative and loving member of a society.
4. The **vocational** dimension of the person, leading him to take up a career and direct it towards nobler goals. Life itself is an invitation to a purpose in life.

To form young people in all these aspects the Preventive System presents loving kindness as the basic strategy of education, which manifests itself in being reasonable with the students and making them aware of the divinity within them. According to Don Bosco, Loving kindness, reason and spirituality are the basic tools without which no integral education can be given

Conclusion

Anyone in the field of education would not only agree that education is an art; but that it is a difficult art, since the educators are handling human beings and not mere objects. The Educator is not the sole master. God alone is the true Master of both the educator and educand. While depending humbly and entirely on Him, the educator should try to acquire that moral strength that is a stranger to force and rigor. Education is not a mere matter of the head, that is giving information and knowledge; rather it is a project of empowering the person. Empowerment can be achieved only with the co-operation of the person. Co-operation of the pupil can be obtained only if the heart of the person is captured. It can be said that the way to the heart is through the heart.

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