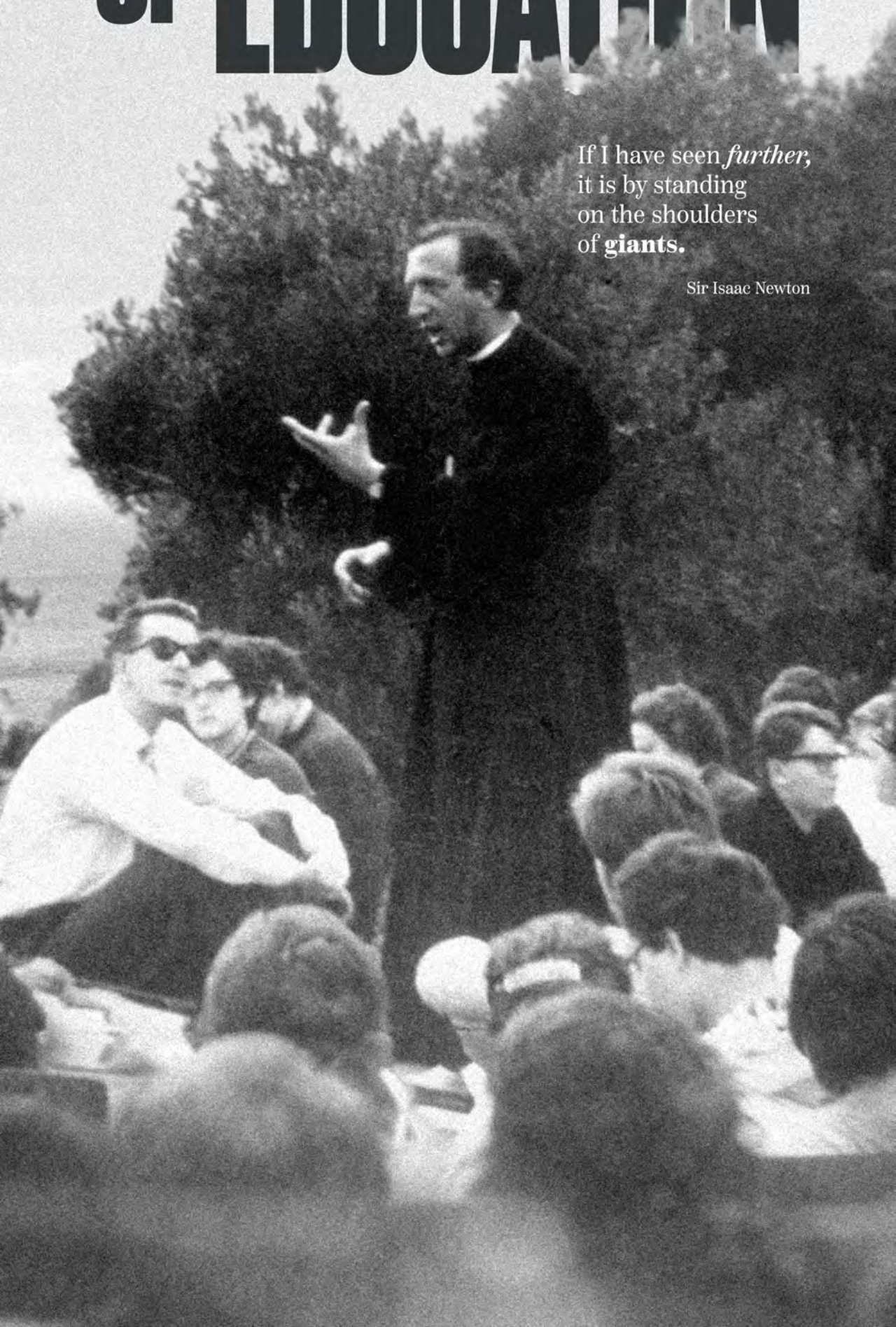


THE **RISK** OF EDUCATION

If I have seen *further*,
it is by standing
on the shoulders
of **giants**.

Sir Isaac Newton





FR. GIUSSANI

EDUCATOR

*“Finding myself all of a sudden on the same level as those who were in the school benches when I was teaching so many years ago, I wanted to communicate only one thing, and the word that says it best is **hope.**”*

Fr. Giussani
Familiarity with Christ

Born in Desio, Italy, a town outside of Milan, Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1945 and immediately began his work in education.

During his early years, encountering many young people, Fr. Giussani saw that **the Catholic faith they were born and raised in was neither pertinent nor impactful in their lives.** He realized that *“the Christian fact was not being presented or offered to them in an adequate way”* (Risk of Education, p. 4), and identified this as a **problem of educational method.**

This insight prompted him to leave his promising teaching career at the Seminary to begin teaching at Milan’s Berchet public high school in 1954, and later at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. Here, **he felt he could make a greater impact helping young men and women rediscover how faith is relevant,** how it is reasonable, or in other words, **profoundly human, because it is the answer to every man’s desire for a meaningful life.**



Father Luigi Giussani



FR. GIUSSANI

PASSION FOR HUMANITY

“Christianity was not born to found a religion; it was born as a passion for man.”

Fr. Giussani
God needs man

“The greatest danger which today’s humanity need fear is not a catastrophe which comes from out there somewhere, neither is it famine, or even disease; rather it is **spiritual malady**, which is the most terrible malady because the most directly human among the scourges is to remain **without the taste for life.**”

Teilhard de Chardin
The Phenomenon of Man

Teilhard de Chardin describes with these words the real crisis we need to fear the most. But what exactly is this *“taste for life”*?

The gusto for living is found not in a perfect life we could have had if things had gone differently, nor in a beautiful future life where all our problems are resolved. **It is in this very life we are living** - with all its challenges, dramas, and even tragedies - **where we realize that we have everything we need to be happy.**

Fr. Giussani believed that **to regain this “taste for living”** we need to **enter into reality** and discover there what makes it possible. For this, we need to be educated.

To journey together, to help every person be aware of their infinite worth and uniqueness. We educate reason to recognize the true meaning of reality and freedom to adhere to it, facing with certainty and hope every circumstance of life.

Luigi Giussani Schools' Mission
Kampala, Uganda





EDUCATION

OUR MOST IMPORTANT TASK

“Please, send us clergy around naked in the streets, take everything away from us, but do not take away the possibility of educating.”

Fr. Giussani
The Risk of Education Conference, 1985

Education is not about acquiring certain knowledge, skills, and values, nor is it about getting into the right college or career. For Fr. Giussani **education is** “introduction into reality”, or **“introduction to total reality”**. Here, the word “total” encompasses both the complete development of all dimensions of a person, and an openness to a relationship with all aspects of reality, up to its very meaning.

“...we never truly affirm reality unless we affirm the existence of its meaning.”
(Risk of Education, 26)

In other words, for Giussani, **education is the process that guides the young into the relationship with reality**, by giving him the tools he needs to engage with it and discover its meaning.

In doing so, young people become more themselves and grow into adults able to build and generate.



Father Luigi Giussani with painter William Congdon and some students in Subiaco

“The basic idea behind the education of young people is that **society is rebuilt through them**. For this reason, the large-scale issue of society on the whole is, first of all, a matter of educating the young.... The chief topic for us... **is education**: how to educate ourselves, what makes an education, and how it is carried out - an education that is true; that is, which corresponds to humanity. It is **education of what is human**, of the original element present in all of us.”

Fr. Luigi Giussani
The Risk of Education, XXVII

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FR. GIUSSANI

THREE ESSENTIAL POINTS

THE RISK OF EDUCATION PREFACE

Of all the things one should say about education, these points are of utmost importance:

1. Education requires an adequate proposal of the past. Without proposing the past, without an awareness of the past, of tradition, young people grow convoluted or skeptical. Tradition is like a working hypothesis which nature uses to launch people into the comparison with all things. Knowingly embracing tradition offers a holistic view of reality. It offers a hypothesis concerning meaning and an image of destiny.
2. The past may only be proposed to young people if it is presented within a present, lived experience that underscores its correspondence with the ultimate needs of the heart. [Giussani asserts that it is necessary to have adults who can embody a proposal of meaning and help students to engage with it. He calls these adults "authorities".]
3. True education must be up to criticism. Our insistence is on critical education. Kids receive from the past through a present experience that they encounter and which proposes the past to them, offering reasons in support of it. But they have to take this past and these reasons and lift them before their eyes, compare them with their own heart, and say, 'It's true,' or 'It's not true' or 'I doubt it.' [verification]... In doing so, they acquire their features as a person.



TRADITION

HYPOTHESIS OF MEANING

"In other words, [the young person's] introduction to the total reality cannot occur without some idea of meaning that the individual in formation considers to be sufficiently solid, intense and sure. Nature demands this."

Fr. Giussani
The Risk of Education



Vincent Van Gogh - *Starry Night Over the Rhone* - 1888, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Everyone walks into life with a tradition. It is the set of values and meaning of things given to us by our parents or the environment in which we are raised. *Tradition*, from the Latin *tradere*, or to "pass on", is revealed in our way of looking, thinking, making judgements, and giving value to what happens. It's the sort of "hypothesis" with which we are launched into the world.

From our youngest years we observe what love is, we learn what to think about money, and we see the value of work. Unlike the contemporary, reductive use of the word tradition (we eat turkey at Thanksgiving and get pajamas for Christmas), it is the way of thinking and feeling ingrained in our origin. An effective education must first, therefore, help the young to take stalk of his or her tradition, to see its relevance in life; to help him or her become self-aware.

Everyone comes into the world by force of a great promise. But then at one year, two, three, when he starts to open his eyes, to see, to hear, to understand, and as he grows up, the child feels that inside him there is an infinite promise. There is an expectation, a desire; there is an expectation of life, an expectation, a question of life, a desire. But if this expectation does not find someone who helps you understand it, who gives it a name, someone who shows you a way to be able to live all this expectation, someone who tells you that this cry you have in your heart can come out of you in a good and meaningful way, if there is no one who helps you, you get angry. The young man gets angry, the young man starts to feel a betrayal. The problem of education is this: that there is someone, an adult, who says, "Come with me. Look, maybe I have the way, maybe I have met something. Let's find out together." That's it.

Silvio Cattarina - L'imprevisto, Pesaro, Italy

L'Imprevisto is a rehabilitation community in Pesaro, Italy, for adolescents who struggle with drug addiction. We interviewed the founder, Silvio Cattarina, and three teenagers in the community: Francesco, Andrea and Francesco.
<https://www.imprevisto.net>



TRADITION

AWARENESS VS REACTIVITY

"Becoming aware of myself means becoming aware of the relationship with my origin"

Fr. Giussani
L'autocoscienza del cosmo
(Self-awareness of the cosmos)

Why is it essential to loyally adhere to one's tradition? If one rejects their given tradition before becoming self-aware (or has a weak tradition to begin with), the

consequences can be grave: uncertainty, alienation, rigidness or skepticism. Thus, **taking one's tradition seriously is essential in the educative process.**

“But *facing existence*, or allowing existence to be faced, without first of all being loyal to what one is born from, that is, tradition, carefully and "critically" addressed - I'll explain this shortly as well - *means once again making one's reactivity the criterion for living*: I feel like it, I don't feel like it, I like it, I don't like it, it seems to me or it doesn't seem to me.”

Fr. Luigi Giussani
Risk of Education Conference

What can help the adult, the teacher or parent, to pass on their tradition and the young in a manner that they can loyally engage with it? **The community.**

The community plays an important role in the life of a young person, as **the community helps to preserve and live out tradition**, passing it on to the young and helping him or her to test it and build on it, not merely repeating, but re-contextualizing it for contemporary life and *"retaining what is good"* (St. Paul)

If you think that there is no great reason why you are in the world, without a great purpose, without a great reason, you are violently driven into extreme, heartbreaking solitude. Those who know the reason why they are in the world have many friends around them.

Silvio Cattarina - *L'imprevisto*, Pesaro, Italy



Vincent Van Gogh - *First Steps (after Millet)* - 1890, MoMA, New York City



AUTHORITY

**A LIVING EMBODIMENT
OF WHAT WE DESIRE**

"The figure of the educator is the place where tradition becomes conscious and a proposal"

Fr. Giussani
The Risk of Education Conference

Giussani doesn't view authority as deriving from formal titles or power. For Giussani, **what makes a person an authority is that he or she lives what you desire.** We want to follow someone when we see a correspondence between what we desire and how the other lives.



Photo by Austin Kehmster

"I don't just say let's do this journey together. We [actually] do it together because the waiting in your heart is so great that you can't hold it in your hands. Because yours are small hands, but the weight is so big that you understand that you have to put it in the hands of someone who has big hands."

Silvio Cattarina, L'imprevisto, Pesaro

“When we discover ourselves helpless and alone, our humanity spurs us to come together. **If we meet someone who better feels and understands our experience, suffering, needs, and expectations, we are naturally led to follow that person and become his or her disciple.** In that sense, such persons naturally constitute authority for us, even if they do not carry special rights or titles. Naturally, above all, it is the one who most loyally lives or understands the human experience who becomes an authority. **Authority is born as a wealth of experience that imposes itself on others.** It generates freshness, wonder, and respect. Inevitably, it is attractive.”

Fr. Luigi Giussani
The Journey to Truth Is an Experience

AUTHORITY

A LIVING EMBODIMENT OF WHAT WE DESIRE

"However, I think that in general everyone in life needs someone to follow. Someone who teaches you how to do [things], how to live, let's say. In here, I started following people who told me what was good for me without getting anything in return. They care about me. I'm important to this place and to these people."

Francesco - Guest at L'imprevisto - Pesaro

"Two years ago, we did a training on authority. 'What does it mean to be an authority, as Giussani says?' In that workshop, we reflected on the fact that for Giussani, the word 'authority' and the word 'paternity' often go together. When he talks about authority, he means a person whose life is fascinating and desirable, and [one] who brings a certainty of the meaning of life and existence that is fascinating."

Andrea Nembrini, Luigi Giussani Primary School Kampala

For Fr. Giussani, **an authority has a passion for and fascination with reality**. Students see someone who is fascinated by reality and is on a journey that they are invited to join. For the young person who is hungry to understand the meaning of things, the meaning of life, a person like this, with certainty and openness, is attractive.

An authority is one who introduces the students or young people to reality as a whole, including to a proposal of the meaning of things (the meaning of math, the meaning of chemistry, the meaning of history, work, relationships, etc.). This proposal of meaning to the students is a hypothesis that **the students must verify for themselves**, just as the teacher verified it for himself or herself.

This hypothesis of meaning is not conveyed solely in the words an authority says but in his or her very person, as a presence in the lives of students that is a living embodiment of a way of living and a way of relating to reality in all its beauty, its difficulties, its questions and drama.





AUTHORITY

**AUCTORITAS:
TO MAKE ONE GROW**

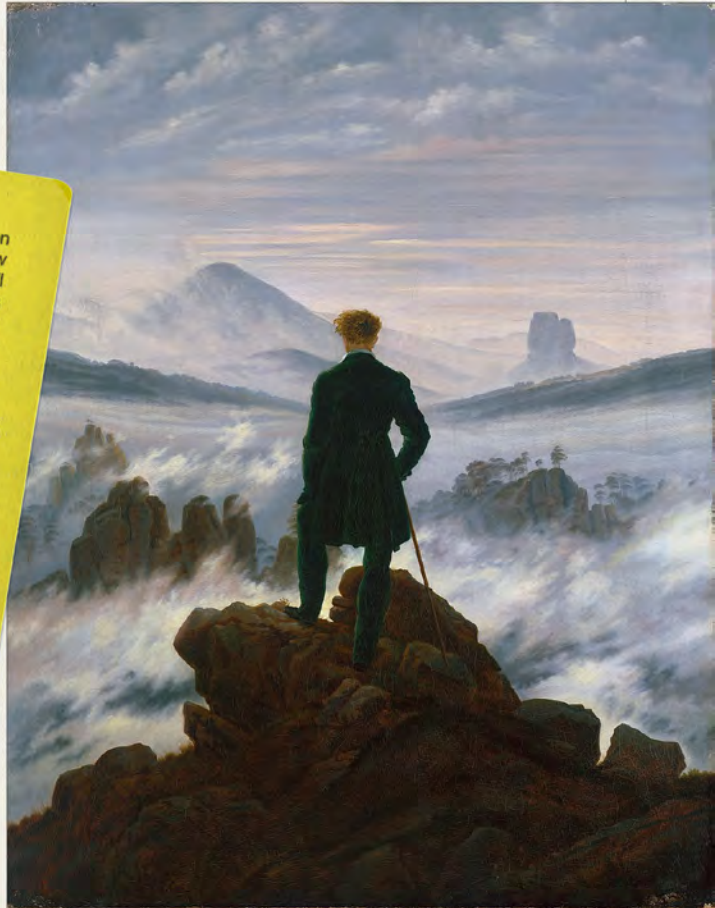
With this definition of authority, Giussani recovers the original meaning of the word from the Latin *auctoritas*: **to make one grow**. By following an authority, our humanity grows as we glimpse the possible meaning of things and begin to verify it for ourselves.

Consequently, one of the greatest challenges of education is not technology (for example- do you use a chalkboard or a laptop; AI or writing papers) nor is it a

matter of choosing the correct curricula or pedagogy (traditional, homeschool, etc.). It is ultimately a challenge of developing the humanity of the teachers because **everything is transmitted to the students through the mind and heart of the person with the task of educating.**

The educational discussion is usually focused on the students. The students are the problems; how do we help the students and their challenges? All these questions need to be asked first of all to us adults and educators. You can be an authority not because of an effort, not because of a technique, not because of a strategy, but because, in the face of the drama, the negative response of the boy, you are not defeated. What kind of hope do I have in the face of "no", or even in the face of school failure, or misbehavior? That is, what makes me be grounded in front of that student? Because the only hope for that boy to take one more step, to change, to improve, is to see in front of him an adult who does not stumble or panic, and does not let himself be overcome by the challenge. So the first question is: what helps us live? You are a witness!

Andrea Nembrini, Luigi Giussani Primary
School Kampala



Caspar David Friedrich - Wanderer above the Sea of Fog - 1818, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg



AUTHORITY

AS A GUIDE

"If at every stage of his life man desires to be his own person during his youth he desires it even more strongly. This must not be understood as a license to do anything, without exception. The young do not want that at all—they are willing to be corrected, they want to be told yes or

no. They need guides, and they want them close at hand. If they turn to authority figures, they do so because they see in them a wealth of human warmth and a willingness to walk with them along the paths they are following."

St. Pope John Paul II
Is There Really Hope in the Young

To be an authority does not mean being perfect. Young people are aware that their parents and educators are human being who can make mistakes; this does not scandalize them. However, Fr. Giussani emphasized **the crucial need for young people to see that these guides genuinely embody the values they teach.**

"But there is something a youngster needs to see, and that is coherence of ideal in the educator. When parents insist on certain values and then, in the evaluation of things in life, they never keep in mind the values they insist on, this generates a scandal, a wound that rarely can be healed, if not after a long time. This is because the young person has first and foremost an enormous logical, rational need. If you insist on this ideal with me, and then in all your judgments this ideal has no effect, this destroys the esteem I have for you."

Fr. Giussani
The Risk of Education Conference

I think [our students] come to school because of this gaze that says, "Come, come and we walk, come and we make this journey together."

Michael Kawuki,
Luigi Giussani High School,
Kampala, Uganda

Silvio always tells us: don't look at me but look where I look. [This is] that point of reference, that adult guide that shows us the path to take.

Andrea - Guest at L'Imprevisto -
Pesaro, Italy

THE BACKPACK

“Up until ten years of age (or perhaps younger now), children can still say: ‘My teacher said so. My mom said so.’ Why? Because **anyone who loves a child will put in their backpack, on their shoulders, all the best things they have experienced and chosen in life.**

Then, at a certain point, nature gives the child, the former child, the instinct to pull the pack around and place it before their eyes (the Greek word is *probállo*, from which we get the English word *problem*). **What others have told us must become a problem!** If it does not become a problem, it will never mature, and we will either irrationally abandon it or irrationally cling to it. Once we have brought the pack around before our eyes, we sift through what is inside. In Greek, this sifting is called *krineîn*, *krisis*- the root of criticism.

Criticism means taking stock of the reasons for things. It does not necessarily have a negative connotation.”

Fr. Giussani
Risk of Education Conference

So young people will sift through the pack and, with this criticism, will compare everything they find inside (that is, everything that tradition has placed on their shoulders) against the desires of their heart. Indeed **the ultimate criterion for judgment is inside of us; otherwise, we are alienated.** And the ultimate criterion, which is in each one of us, is identical: it is **the need for what is true, beautiful and good.**



“Verification is everything. Without verification, I am left at the level of obligation, at a surface level of a circumstance. Unpacking the “backpack” and verifying if something is a good, gives me the discovery of reasonableness. Once I verify, then I can truly move; I can be free. I can be free to propose, to share, to discover, to risk.”

Ed Smith - Principal of J.C. Bermudez Doral Senior High School - Florida



VERIFICATION

THROUGH EXPERIENCE

“To give reasons means showing how what I give you is capable of helping you face up to the more or less dramatic, more or less impassioned questions that reality places in front of you in an intelligent and cordial way, like a man”

Fr. Giussani
Risk of Education Conference

A primary concern of educating the young is to **relentlessly encourage the student to make a constant comparison between what they hear, see, and feel and their own heart and desires.** That is, to verify the truth of every proposal or position with all that happens around them, judging from the deepest needs of their heart.

Conviction cannot happen without this verification, and this verification requires active dialogue with another. Dialogue continuously prompts young people to take personal responsibility for the work of verification, encouraging them to **judge every value, idea or proposal,** even those they agree with. The word verification comes from the latin *verus* (“true”) + *faciō* (“make”); in other words, **to seek the truth.**



Gustave Courbet - Sieving Grain - 1853-1854, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes

§§ What does the experience of correspondence between the real (the hypothesis) and one's consciousness (oneself) consist of? It lies in the fact that the *"embraced or received idea"* is discovered to be *"in vital connection with one's situations, relevant to one's needs and projects."* Conviction arises as a verification in which the starting idea or vision proves to be the **keystone for all encounters,** deeply connected to what one is living, and thus a resolving light for experiences. One's entire personal reality is thus found in correspondence with that original idea, which unconsciously served as a hypothesis, and to which **all of humanity becomes devoted** as its validity is gradually experienced.

Fr. Luigi Giussani
Bring Hope





VERIFICATION

AND FREEDOM

“Educating is all too often taken to mean simply explaining concepts. But after the explanations are laid out, there is still a great deal to do because they are abstract and extraneous. Our energy, our freedom must be engaged.”

Fr. Giussani
The Risk of Education



L'Imprevisto - Pesaro, Italy

Verification **requires the student's freedom.** An adequate educational method solicits students' responsibility that is **free of conditions, prejudices, or limits**, as personal involvement is a necessary condition for the young to develop in maturity and self-understanding. Our modern, rationalistic culture favors putting conditions on one's investigation; stopping at the point where one's beliefs are challenged.

The educator's role is to **encourage the young to do an honest work**, without premature closure of an investigation.

I have to say, without a doubt, that I never considered before reading Giussani the fact of betting everything on the other person's freedom. I knew better and I had the "fix" and the answer to a judgment/situation that at the end (I understand this now) is not mine to give for another person.

Ed Smith - Principal of J.C. Bermudez
Doral Senior High School - Florida

In the morning, I am always at the gate to welcome our students. When students are late, you see that they are really telling you a lie, a lot of lies to justify their late coming. So I have to ask myself, "What does it mean for me to go in front of these students with silence?" And a friend told me, "How is it possible that you go in front of them without silence?" And from this question, I discovered how this silence always helps me to stand in front of them. Because without saying: "I am here in front of them, but please [Jesus] be with me", it is impossible to even face the freedom of others.

Fredy Komakech, Luigi Giussani High School
Kampala, Uganda



VERIFICATION

AS A DIALOGUE

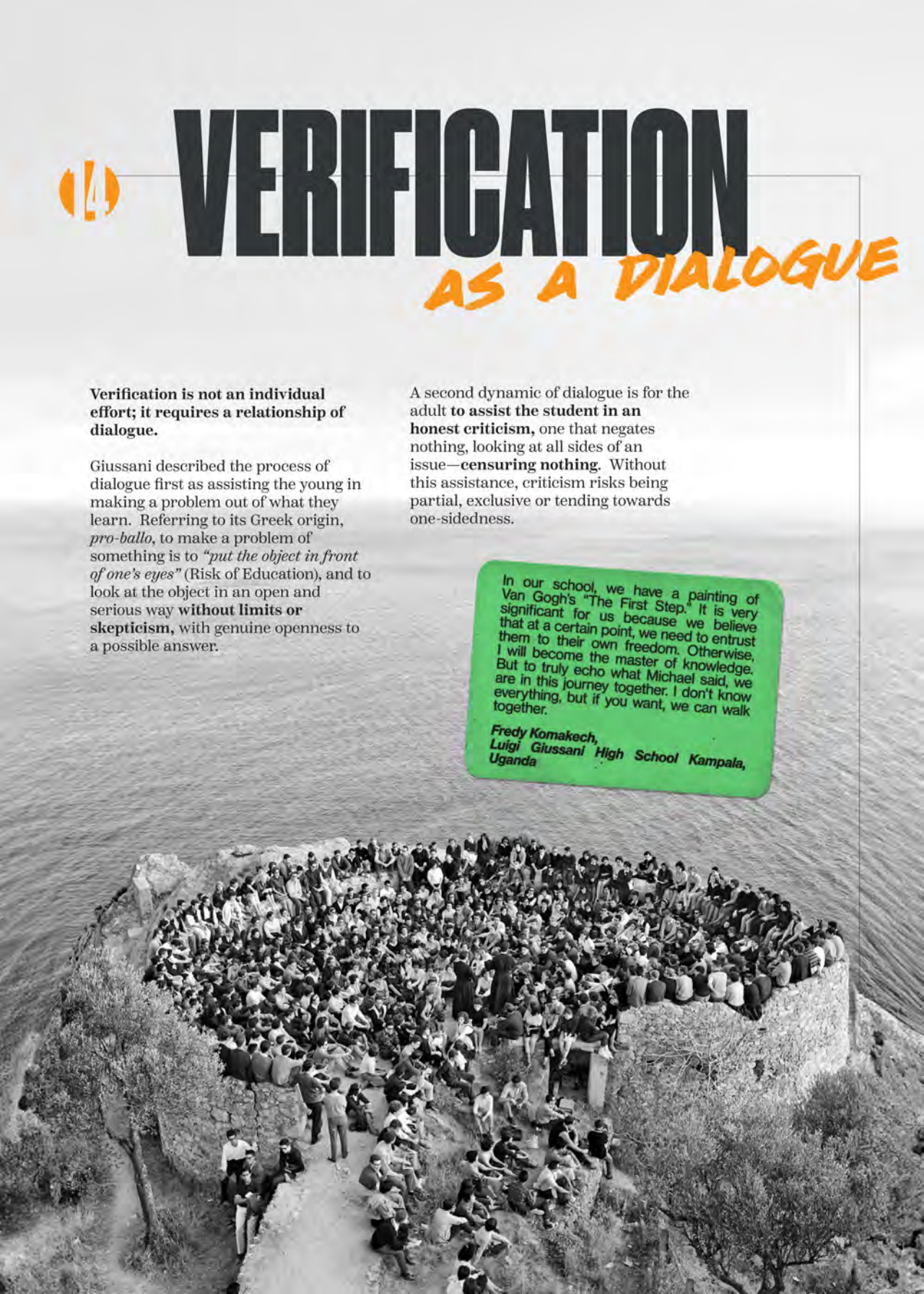
Verification is not an individual effort; it requires a relationship of dialogue.

Giussani described the process of dialogue first as assisting the young in making a problem out of what they learn. Referring to its Greek origin, *pro-ballo*, to make a problem of something is to “*put the object in front of one’s eyes*” (Risk of Education), and to look at the object in an open and serious way **without limits or skepticism**, with genuine openness to a possible answer.

A second dynamic of dialogue is for the adult to assist the student in an **honest criticism**, one that negates nothing, looking at all sides of an issue—**censuring nothing**. Without this assistance, criticism risks being partial, exclusive or tending towards one-sidedness.

In our school, we have a painting of Van Gogh's "The First Step." It is very significant for us because we believe that at a certain point, we need to entrust them to their own freedom. Otherwise, I will become the master of knowledge. But to truly echo what Michael said, we are in this journey together. I don't know everything, but if you want, we can walk together.

**Fredy Komakech,
Luigi Giussani High School Kampala,
Uganda**





VERIFICATION

A WORK OF CHARITY AND RISK

Finally, for Giussani dialogue involves doing works of charity as a way of verifying the truth of what one learns. This puts the students' learning into action, helping them understand life's challenges and their own needs more deeply. Interest in one's own life is greater to the degree that one **feels the problems of life**, a relationship with others helps the student understand the depth of his or her own need.

Giussani goes so far as to state, *"because one learns in action, I prefer that a student study a little less, receiving a B or C grade, and learn how to start to give a piece of his free time to others"*

The Risk of Education

The risk of accepting what is given and involving oneself in serious work in the verification of every hypothesis is the challenge and the risk to which the adolescent is called.

Unfortunately, according to Giussani, **the modern mentality favors abandoning the young in the verification process**, allowing the person to come to conclusions on their own. With modern life pulling the young in a multitude of directions, it is natural for him or her to renounce the work of verification before beginning.





CONCLUSION

WHAT IS THIS RISK IN EDUCATION?

"...both the proposal and even the adult's action that verifies the proposal stop on the threshold of the mystery of the freedom of the child or of the one being educated."

Fr. Giussani
Risk of Education Conference

In the educational adventure, the result is not automatic, logical or guaranteed. The conditions of a true education, summarized by Fr. Giussani with the words tradition, authority and verification, are necessary but **never sufficient to ensure an anticipated outcome**. In fact, Fr Giussani says, all the attempts of educating the young **stop in front of his or her freedom**.

"Man, and therefore also his own boy or young man, is a free relationship with destiny, with the infinite, with God, with truth and with good. It is a free relationship, therefore it is mysterious the path along which the search for destiny will move in him."

Engaging in this work without any assurance about the effects of one's effort is perceived by any educator (teacher, parent, employer, ...) as a dramatic risk. But this risk *"can never suspend the inexhaustibility of our attention, of our proposal and of our help."*



L'Imprevisto - Pesaro, Italy

I'm very struck by Rose, who lately has been saying that she really enjoys these "no's." Because, if nothing else, they mean that our students are free, that we are not raising them like little soldiers who blindly obey our ideas. A "no" is also someone who is trying to have his say. This doesn't mean leaving them on the street, or not engaging, or not running after them on their wrong paths. But what struck me the most is the great serenity she has in saying this. She says that we are not alone in this game. That is, those who have faith know this very well, that all our effort is like a small hand that must make its own contribution to the big hand that is already supporting these kids entrusted to us.

Andrea Nembrini, Luigi Giussani Primary School Kampala, Uganda

"The Risk of Education" is a journey that we continue to travel and grow in. Our students, teachers, staff, and families are given to us to travel this road.

Ed Smith - Principal of J.C. Bermudez Doral Senior High School - Florida

CONCLUSION

WHAT IS THIS RISK
IN EDUCATION?

"It is therefore necessary to continually propose, hoping against all hope in any situation, continually seizing the opportunity to show the reasonableness of what has been supported and given, even when the reactivity seems to be going in the opposite way, even when it seems that one's own child, or the student, must be impervious, even when he obviously follows other paths: [it is necessary] **to continue in this paternal and maternal, generative duty**, with this contrition of the heart, with this tremendous bitterness, [it is necessary] **to overcome the discouragement.**

Here, it is at this point that the "risk" of education plays [its role]: because **we, the adults, are given the right to**

love, that is, to propose and accompany through verification, so that the person to whom it is proposed can grasp the reasons that we have grasped. **This is love.** It cannot be the claim of an obedience, which must follow a persuasion, a conviction not yet formed."

Fr. Giussani,
Risk of Education Conference

I didn't want to accept that there was any good for me. But every day, people came here and proposed again and made a constant effort to show me that there could be, that there can still be something beautiful for my life. It's something that no one had ever done for me. And so I gave in to this good, I'm still trying to give in to this goodness.

Francesco - Guest at L'Imprevisto
Pesaro, Italy



SOURCE

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