



Approach-based skills

Because of who we are, our backgrounds, our experiences etc. we all look at things or approach things differently. It is like looking at the world through our own inner window.

Don Bosco approached his work with young people, by looking through his window; for him his work involved four different window panes – School, Church, Playground and Home. The vital part of all this fourfold pattern was **balance**. No child was pushed to pursue one at the expense of the other. If he saw a person constantly in Church and never in the playground he was concerned. If a young person was regularly alone and did not feel at home with the rest of the group he wanted to find out why. If someone was always studying and not spending time with his friends he would talk to his teachers to balance things up. Don Bosco used this fourfold approach to young people as a way of seeing into their world.

What skills do I need to work with the young? Maybe the language above feels a little ancient – but new words like *Belonging*, *Learning*, *Meaning* and *Celebration* can be substituted.

Belonging

In my situation how do I make each child or young person feel welcome? What words or actions can I use to help them feel as if they are fully part of the group? A question here, a comment there; am I creating a safe and caring environment?

Learning

In every activity we do together how do I create the possibility of growth? Are my activities well planned (even those that seem to occur spontaneously)? Do I create the conditions for learning leadership skills, standing back and encouraging the young in their plans and ideas?

Meaning

Is the idea of linking 'Faith and Fun' part of my geography? How am I helping children to sense God's presence in every situation? Do I encourage young people to take the lead in organising faith moments?

Celebrating

How many times have you been bored? I mean really bored!! Staying young with the young involves laughter and fun. Young people need to be able to run, to make noise, to do things to burn off energy – do I create the right environment for this (a safe and caring one)?

Relationship skills

Don Bosco asked Salesians to treat the young as their teachers. To learn the needs, hopes, and insecurities of young people should be paramount in the minds and the hearts of Salesians. This attitude of reverence is rooted in the recognition of God's unfolding presence in every young life. The Salesian serves this inner spirit in the young by growing into the Gospel image of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In adopting this good shepherd role four relationship skills are vital.

Respect

The mystery of God at the heart of the young demands that a Salesian be polite, honest, genuine and sensitive in relating to the young. The dignity of the young person should be obvious in the behaviour of the Salesian.

Understanding

A Salesian works with the limitations and potential of young people as groups and as individuals. Knowing their fears and strengths the Salesian shepherds them towards experiences that lead to life, preventing harm before it happens.

Affection

Engaging young people with the heart; establishing genuine, friendly relationships with the young people is essential to the Salesian work. Don Bosco said that affection sets up an electric current of confidence between adult and young person by which hearts are opened, hurts are healed and life unfolds for both the Salesian and the young person.

Humour

Don Bosco saw fun and laughter as an expression of faith in the God of life. In touching what is deepest in the young he preferred noise, laughter and chaos to heavy and solemn silences. Cheerfulness in adults and young people is a sign of holiness for Salesians.

The above four words spell out the Hebrew word for spirit: **Ruah**, the breath of God.

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