

“FEW WORDS AND A LOT OF ACTION...”

*An introduction to the working style of
Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw*

Colophon

This is a publication of Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw. Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw is an international network of Salesian youth work offices and youth organizations which work in the style of don Bosco.

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“Few words and a lot of action...”

Don Bosco Youth-Net is a part of the worldwide Don Bosco Movement. This movement is based on the legacy of its founder: Don Bosco. Don Bosco developed an educational system based on a dialogue between the Christian tradition and the needs of the society he was living in. It is this educational system which still connects all people active in the Don Bosco Movement today; Don Bosco’s working style is our common denominator.

But the present-day society is different than that of Don Bosco’s time. A new sociological perspective of mankind and the differences between cultures within the Don Bosco Movement demand for a contemporary translation of the system. In order to do so we need to position Don Bosco Youth-Net within the current society and also within the current Don Bosco Movement. Afterwards we can present Don Bosco Youth-Net’s working style by focussing on 4 key elements: the themes of youth work Don Bosco Youth-Net is active in, the way we use the model of the “Oratory” as a method to structure our projects, the way we create an educational flow within an educational programmes and the style of work of the educators involved in our network.

This document aims at defining the work we do, and how we do it. This is a challenging job for several reasons. On the one hand people involved in the Don Bosco Movement are more used to working through the system rather than defining it – Don Bosco’s statement that in assisting, educators should use “few words and a lot of action...” only strengthens this tradition. On the other hand, people from outside the Don Bosco Movement are asking what we are doing and in which manner it is different than that of others. Therefore, we wrote this document in a style which we hope will be understandable for both.

A man who started a Movement

Giovanni Bosco was born into a poor farmer's family on the 16th of August 1815 in Becchi, a small village in Northern Italy's countryside near the city of Turin. This was a turbulent period in European history; it was the time of the rise and fall of the Napoleonic Empire and the industrial revolution.

Turin was in the middle of this turbulence. The Napoleonic wars consumed tens of thousands of Italian men. The Council of Vienna divided Italy again into smaller states, resulting in a 50 years' period of political instability and more wars. When the first industrial revolution started in Piedmont, many young people were forced to migrate from the impoverished countryside to the industrialised capital of Turin in the hope of finding work and building a better life. Often this proved to be false hope. One could say that the classic liberal ideology of low state intervention was a main factor which led to the systematic abuse of young people of the city who found a job in the workshops and factories. Those who could not find a job were condemned to vagrancy or joined street gangs. Both options often led them to a life in prison.

It is in this context where Don Bosco found his mission. After his priestly ordination in 1841, Don Bosco moved to Turin to continue his studies. Part of his work was to visit the prisons around Turin, where he was confronted with young boys being imprisoned together with serious criminals. In the streets he met homeless boys roaming around aimlessly, most of whom were unable to find work, and those that could were generally doing so in terrible conditions. Don Bosco was profoundly moved by the circumstances the boys were living in and decided to dedicate himself to their wellbeing.

Not everyone approved of the idea of a priest dedicating his ministry to working with street children. Don Bosco was forced to make a choice – to continue with his vocation as a priest within the church establishment or with the boys living in poverty. He took the option for the poor. This was not an easy decision to make, as a priest it left him without housing, without promotion prospects or, indeed, much of a future or an income. He chose to live his life on the streets like the boys he was working with.

The core of his work was done in the “**Oratory**”. The oratory started as a kind of Sunday school where Don Bosco would meet boys from the street for worship, a breakfast and catechesis. Gradually the oratory developed into a youth centre, which was the combination of a boarding **house**, a **school**, a **playground** and a **parish**.

The development process from this “*ad hoc*-structured” Sunday school to the “formal-structured” youth centre is a good example of his pragmatic approach to reality:

The boarding house grew out of the need of orphans looking for a shelter. What was important for him was that the boys would not only find a shelter, but also a home in the oratory. By offering vocational training, such as cobbling or tailoring, the boys learned a trade and could earn an honest living. Don Bosco identified playing as essential to the development of the boys. This is why in the oratory many activities were held for the boys to enjoy themselves, ranging from playing games to developing theatre and wind orchestras. As a Catholic priest Don Bosco used worship, catechesis and confession to teach the boys to become good Christians.

A vital part of this fourfold pattern was **balance**. No child was pushed to pursue one thing at the expense of the other. When he saw a person constantly in prayer and never in the playground, he was concerned. When a young person was regularly alone and did not feel at home with the rest of the group, he wanted to find out why. When 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.

Over the years, through working in the oratories he had set-up, Don Bosco developed a pedagogical approach of working with the boys which he called the ‘preventive system’. The system Don Bosco propagates is to prevent dysfunctional behaviour by a pro-active encouragement of young people, so there is no need to enforce authority. The key element in the system was the constant presence of the educators amongst the boys. The preventive system is based, as Don Bosco calls it, on the triad: reason – religion – loving kindness.

The ultimate aim of the preventive system was not just to render young people profitable for the economy, but as a method for them to find autonomy in life, becoming “good Christians and honest citizens”. Therefore, Don Bosco also engaged himself in actively building society through the development of solidarity mechanisms (mutual aid societies), social negotiations (internships, work contracts), and entrepreneurship (workshops).

Of course all this work could not be done alone. First it was his family, friends and the elder boys who helped run the oratories. When the work was growing too big, the congregation of the ‘Salesians’ was founded. The expansion to girls came with the establishment of the order of ‘Salesian Sisters’. Over the years many lay people from different social classes helped out as well. They were eventually organised by the establishment of the ‘Salesian Co-operators’. Also geographically the movement started to expand: France, Spain, Argentina and elsewhere.

When Don Bosco died on the 31st of January 1888, the Don Bosco Movement was only just beginning. In the next hundred years, 2.600 houses of the Salesians and Salesian Sisters would open all over the world.

21st Century, a new context

2015 marks the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco. The global Don Bosco Movement is currently active in 132 countries, spanning 6 continents. As societies in different parts in the world differ so much, we first need to set a boundary. Although our work does not stop at European borders, Don Bosco Youth-Net is aware that it is a network consisting of European organisations. In order to continue it is therefore necessary to translate Don Bosco's work into this new context.

The modernisation of European society, which began during Don Bosco's time, continues nowadays, the pace of much of which has quickened in today's society: globalisation, industrialisation, secularisation, individualisation, migration. Because of globalisation and migration, European society has become more multi-cultural and multi-religious.

Even though many things have changed over the last 200 years, the questions young people are struggling with are still largely the same as the questions that young people put forward in Don Bosco's day: What am I doing here? What is the purpose of my life? What are my skills and abilities? What do I think is of value? For what projects do I want to work? Don Bosco organisations try to offer young people a place where they can help them to discover answers to these questions.

Another similarity to Don Bosco's time is that the turbulent political and economic situation hinders young people to develop autonomy and force many to migrate in search for work or a better life. As a result there are still many young people who are on the margins of society: the homeless, young offenders, NEETs¹, 3rd and 4th generation migrants, ROMA youth and refugees. Young people who do not get the opportunities that others have, or who are looking for meaning in this affluent society. Don Bosco educators still work for this group of young people put in underprivileged positions, in the same way as the Don Bosco educators in the 19th century.

Not only is Don Bosco's wish to help young people in disadvantaged positions still alive, but also the system he used, his method of working and his attitude to life. Don Bosco educators still feel inspired by this system, which is continued not because of tradition, but because it is still relevant and it still works. Nowadays, many basic principles of Don Bosco's educating ideas can also be found again in social or pedagogic developments, and in views, as 'problem-oriented working', 'prevention work', starting a dialogue on 'values and standards', 'stimulating social responsibility' and 'looking for the inner motivation of children and young people.' Therefore, the educational system of Don Bosco is also 'of this time' in the 21st century.

¹ NEET stands for 'Young people Not in Employment, Education nor Training'. It is a categorisation used by national and European institutions to refer to different groups of young people which are unavailable for the labour market.

The Don Bosco Movement, the Preventive System and Don Bosco Youth-Net

The society of Saint Francis de Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco) and the Don Bosco works constitute the fundamental base for the worldwide Don Bosco Movement. The Don Bosco works are organisations which work with or for young people. There are close links between the Salesian congregation and the Don Bosco works because many of the works are connected to the houses of and many Salesians are working in Don Bosco works. There is also a strong methodological link between both - Don Bosco's educational style of working with young people.

Salesians of Don Bosco

To understand the place of Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw in this Don Bosco Movement, it is necessary to understand how the Salesian congregation is structured in the world:

The head of the structure is the General Directorate, with its president the Rector Mayor. The General Directorate is divided into 5 departments: Formation, Youth Ministry, Social Communication, Missions and Finance/Administration. These departments are managed through head offices, which are responsible for the follow-up towards the provinces.

The General Directorate is responsible for the overall management of the congregation. The world is divided into regions (or conferences) coordinated by a regional. Each region is divided into a number of provinces.

A province can be a state, regions within a state or a combination of (regions of) states. The president of a province is the provincial. The province has the same departments as the General Directorate. The province is divided into 'houses' which are usually animated by communities of SDB. The houses often host several local works. These works include schools, vocational training centres, universities, student hostels, youth clubs, sports clubs, residential youth care facilities, youth shelters, parishes, spirituality centres, etc.

Working areas²	Works	Beneficiaries
Oratories & youth centres	1.929	793.867
Schools	3.643	938.351
Vocational training centres & professional schools	826	200.232
Universities & higher education institutes	85	122.657
Boarding hostels	441	44.217
Parishes & missions	2.277	7.126.066
Works of Social promotion	688	282.261
Total	9.889	9.507.651

The network of people actively involved within the province, a house or a work is called an "Educative and Pastoral Community": *Educative*, because they work within the educational style of Don Bosco, *Pastoral*, because they work from a faith-based background offering young people pastoral care and spiritual guidance, and *Community*, because it refers to all people which have a role in its work (young people and adults, parents and teachers or educators, religious and lay,

² These numbers are made available by the SDB congregation through <http://statisticsal.net>. Statistics are relative and need a continued updating. For the current statistics one can consult with the communications department of the Salesian Congregation in Rome.

representatives of other church and civic institutions and can also include representatives of other religions, men and women of good will).

The website of the Salesian Congregation gives a full introduction into the history, the General Directorate, the fields of work, the Salesian family, current developments and educational style of Don Bosco: <http://www.sdb.org/>.

The preventive system

The preventive system is a value-based educational system which was developed by Don Bosco during the 19th century. It is the unifying educational basis for working with youth in the worldwide Don Bosco Movement. This educational system has proven to be a successful model and inspiration for educators on different continents, in multicultural and multi-religious contexts over the centuries. As such, its implementation is the point of reference and measure of authenticity for being part of the Don Bosco Movement.

Working within this global context it is important that the preventive system is adapted to the cultural context of each educational and pastoral community (i.e. provinces, houses, local works). Therefore, each province develops a “Provincial Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project”, which includes the objectives, strategies and guidelines for the Salesian work within that province. This document then serves as a basis for each house or work to develop its own “Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project”. This is an action plan on how to implement the preventive system within their local setting.

On global level the Salesian Youth Ministry department of the Salesian congregation has published the “Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference”. This publication as a resource for inspiration and a tool offering action guidelines for all “Educative and Pastoral Communities” to develop their “Salesian Educative and Pastoral Projects”, respecting both their cultural context as well as the basis foundations of the preventive system.

International networks

Out of pragmatic reasons, several international networks have originated within the Don Bosco Movement. Each of these networks has a particular thematic scope within which they develop common actions. The international networks communicate mainly on the level of the regions and the General Directorate. Currently we can identify following international networks within the Don Bosco Movement:

1. Don Bosco Network: international network of Development NGO’s.
2. Don Bosco Youth-Net: international network for non-formal youth work.
3. PGS International: international network for youth sports organisations
4. Salesian Youth Movement Europe: international platform of youth ministry activities
5. World congregation of Past-Pupils of Don Bosco: international confederation of past-pupils

Next to the international networks, the SDB congregation also has official bodies representing the Don Bosco Movement at international institutions. These bodies operate on the same level as the international networks, however are focussed stronger on advocacy than on actions. Currently we can identify following international advocacy offices:

1. Don Bosco International: international office representing the SDB congregation at the European institutions.
2. Salesian Missions, Inc.: international office representing the SDB congregation at the UN's ECOSOC in New York.

DBYN's educational methodology

Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw brings together member organisations active in 20+ Salesian provinces and 2 Salesian regions. In between our member organisations there is diversity in "Salesian Educative and Pastoral Projects". In the past, this diversity has led to confusion. Therefore, DBYN decided to develop "Few words and a lot of action", which is our "Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project".

Developing such a "Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project" on international level is fundamentally different than developing one on provincial or local level. We need to create a common language which brings together this diversity in cultural interpretations, caters for diversity of Salesian spirituality and welcomes different denominations and non-faith-based worldviews. Therefore, our "Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project" is complementary offering our member organisations, volunteers and young people a reference framework for cooperation.

DBYN works together with international non-governmental youth organisations, other civil society organisations and international institutions. The language used within the Don Bosco Movement is often jargon-based, making it difficult for external partners to understand our working style. Inspired by Don Bosco's letter from the 21st of February 1878 to the Italian minister for internal affairs, Francesco Crispi, in which he uses a secularised language to present the preventive system, we choose for this document a similar approach. We avoid jargon and use standard educational concepts current in the European field of youth work and education. For example, we opt to speak about DBYN's educational methodology instead of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project of Don Bosco Youth-Net.

The Don Bosco style for Don Bosco Youth-Net

In the previous chapter we mentioned that it is the working style of Don Bosco which unites the Don Bosco Movement. At the same time, we need to differentiate approaches within this style: working with street children in Africa creates different needs in approach compared with offering formal education in a secondary school in Europe. When the setting is different, the goals are different and the approach needs to be adapted.

The Don Bosco style for Don Bosco Youth-Net is based on 4 key elements:

1. Themes: the themes of youth work Don Bosco Youth-Net is active in and forms the thematic orientation of educational activities.
2. Learning environment – the Oratory criterion: we use the model of the “Oratory” as a method to structure our projects and create a strong learning environment for the learners.
3. Educational flow: the way we create an educational flow inside our learning environment.
4. Style of the educator – Assistance: the style all Don Bosco educators should apply within this learning environment, building an educational flow throughout the learning programme

Themes

Don Bosco Youth-Net is an international network of Don Bosco youth work organisations. Within youth work we focus on following themes:

- Non-formal education: The Don Bosco Movement has been utilising non-formal methods for education since the days of Don Bosco. Don Bosco Youth-Net is part of this tradition. In all our projects we apply a learner-centred and participatory approach, using experience-based and active methods within a clearly organised learning process. In this way we offer both the individual and the group a holistic and process-oriented learning experience aimed at improving their competences outside the formal educational curriculum.
- Voluntarism: Volunteers are catering for young people in all our partner organisations. Don Bosco Youth-Net strengthens this practice by creating opportunities for volunteers on an international level and recognising their contribution in different working structures of DBYN. Furthermore, we help with youth work development. By creating opportunities where our member organisations can exchange experiences and good practice, we support those members who are just starting up or are looking for answers to the challenges they are confronted with.
- Participation: Our organisational structure is constructed in such a way we ensure young are being included on all levels of our organisation. It is young people who govern the decision making bodies, it is young people who set-up and manage our international projects, it is young people who train other young people to become involved in our network... Through our participative approach we aim to prepare our youth for their full participation in all fields of society: social, economic, political, cultural, educational, judicial and religious.

- **Social Inclusion:** Working with young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds was the origin of the Don Bosco Movement. All our member organisations are working locally with a diversity of target groups facing social exclusion: unemployed youth, youth with behavioural problems, migrant youth, Roma youth or young refugees. Within the network we exchange this expertise through study visits, seminars and publications. Our international volunteers go to work in street children projects in development countries. We try to lower the barriers to participation in our international activities as best as we can, so the young, the disadvantaged especially, can better participate.
- **Human Rights:** The work of our member organisation often has a Human Rights dimension because of our inclusive approach, as many young people catered for in our activities are facing intrusions to their Human rights. As a Christian organisation we promote to protect the human dignity of each young person, as civil society organisation we are called to a human rights-based approach when protecting their human dignity in order to build a universal culture of Human Rights in society.

Learning environment – the Oratory criterion

As mentioned in the first chapter, the oratory was the main place of work for Don Bosco. The combination of a home, a school, a playground and a parish made the oratory a safe learning environment for the young people Don Bosco was working with. The oratory became the foundation of Don Bosco’s youth work, has been used ever since in the Don Bosco Movement.

Over the years the “Oratory” was abstracted into a model called the “**Oratory criterion**”. This model makes it possible to adapt for use on different levels of work. The idea of this model is that the 4 places of the oratory always need to be **present and balanced** in Don Bosco youth work, but they can be translated to the needs of the situation.

For example, within Don Bosco Youth-Net we use the Oratory criterion to organise our activities. First of all, we make sure that everyone feels at home. When the participants of an international meeting feel at ease, this will improve the working atmosphere. Secondly we see every activity as a learning experience, offering training adapted to the type of activity. Thirdly we make sure there are enough informal moments, so the participants can have a chat or play a game, in short: have fun together. Finally, we make sure there is time and space available to reflect, to pray, to come to silence.

Oratory <i>(4 places)</i>	Oratory criterion <i>(Don Bosco Youth-Net)</i>	Values <i>(Educational goals)</i>
Home	A place of their own	Freedom
School	A place to learn	Responsibility
Playground	A place to play	Solidarity
Parish	A place of sense	Meaning

We also use the Oratory criterion on an educational level: young people themselves are responsible for their development. This development is stimulated by communicating with people around them (other young people and adults) and by critically reflecting the world they are living in. This process of growth is stimulated for all, (whether as an organisation, as a volunteer, as an educator, or a trainer) by focussing on 4 values we set as educational goals. The values are symbolically linked to the four places of the Oratory criterion.

Freedom... a place of their own

Young people need a place “of their own”, where they feel at home and where they get the necessary space to be themselves, to express their feelings and to shape their own personality.

Young people are dynamic people who develop themselves into an integral and unique person. This presupposes a growth in personal freedom though - they want to acquire freedom, even if they haven't immediately got an ideal in view. Young people must be given the necessary space and means to do this, how this is done is dependent on the society they are living in. This entails a double challenge: on one hand to support young people with their integration into the society, on the other hand to let them be critically-constructive towards this society.

We organise our educational activities in venues which allow our participants to build-up their own learning environment. In this way we stimulate both the non-formal and the informal learning process. Within the non-formal learning process, the set-up of the room and the educational materials developed by participants and educators are to be used as visual aids throughout the learning programme. In order to stimulate the informal learning process, we create a positive playful atmosphere which is welcoming the participants into the programme.

In our educational activities we apply a learner-centred approach. We put young people at the centre so they learn to take charge of their own learning process, gearing it towards their individual learning needs. The educators facilitate this process by adjusting the learning content to the level and backgrounds of the participants.

“A place of their own” is a safe learning environment. Safeguarding is a tool to create this welcoming, cordial and respectful way of dealing with one another. Therefore, safeguarding doesn't focus on issues to be forbidden or restricted, but takes human dignity and the importance of every single young person as a reference on how to deal with one another. It is only in this respectful relationship that young people feel they can enter into dialogue and that values can be shared. As this safe environment where everyone is treated with respect is vital to the network, all Don Bosco educators have received training on safeguarding issues.

Responsibility... a place to learn

Young people need a place “to learn”, where they get the space or opportunity to enhance their skills and knowledge, where they learn to assume the responsibility for the surrounding reality, where they become capable of playing their part in society in a constructive way.

Freedom without boundaries is the biggest lack of freedom whilst responsibility creates the correct balance. That's why young people should get the opportunity to exercise responsibility in very concrete situations, adapted to their age and the already acquired skills. By taking up responsibility, young people are challenged to shape the social context and at the same time to stand up against unjust systems, poverty, oppression and intrusions to human rights.

The educators clarify the aims and objectives of the intended non-formal learning programme using it as basis for feedback by the participants on the learning process through reflection, active reviewing, mentoring and evaluation. In this way the learners are called to adjust their own expectations to the intended educational impact of the learning programme. Within the informal learning process the care of the venue is given to the participants, who need to maintain the learning environment in a respectful way and show appreciation to the people catering for their stay.

Each young person is the one who is first responsible for his or her own growth and maturity, reaching autonomy in society. Therefore, we apply a holistic learning approach. Holistic learning promotes the development of the whole person, their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials, cutting across the different domains of the society they are living in. As such it is a competence-based approach, interlinking knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for life in society. Holistic learning is also differentiated learning. The learning activities should address a range of learning styles, address multiple intelligences and address all 4 cognitive, emotive, social and technical domains.

Solidarity... a place to play

Young people need a place “to play”, where they can meet their peers, can talk and discuss openly, build and maintain relations with others, where they can accept solidarity and can organise and experience things together.

Young people do not stand alone in life. They should get the chance to experience solidarity, so they can integrate it into their lives. This solidarity should not be limited to their peer group, but needs to be opened towards a broader society.

We use play to encourage both the non-formal and the informal learning process. The venue and facilities are selected on the availability of space which allows a flexible set-up, and outdoor for play, sports and other leisure time activities. We foresee time and materials so the young people can use these spaces during the informal moments for their own. In this way we extract education from formal structures, promoting a more decentralised approach of the learning environment. When we educate at the place to play, every informal meeting place of youth can become a place of learning.

When playing, the focus is not only on the individual player but also the dynamics of the group. As such we promote cooperative learning. In cooperative learning young people learn through working together to seek outcomes that are beneficial both to themselves and to all members of the group. Cooperative learning promotes higher achievement, greater productivity, more caring, supportive, committed relationships and greater social competence, friendship, trust and self-esteem. In this way cooperation becomes a basis for solidarity.

Meaning... a place of sense

Young people need a place “of sense”, where they can find the possibility to search for their raison d’être, for meaning in their lives.

A lot of young people are looking for ‘sense’ in their life, to see who they can be and what they can mean for the broader world they are living in. That is why it is extremely important to let them feel search for what is valuable in their lives, for what they stand for, for how they make their lives meaningful. It is important to help young people determine their identity concerning the core problems of life and of living together.

We foresee in our activities a room which is reserved for silent reflection. This room can be used by all participants if they need a moment for themselves. In our learning programmes we integrate different sessions which are partly or exclusively directed at values clarification. In this the participants are given opportunities to identify, clarify and express their own beliefs and values and to confront them with others in a safe framework based on the dignity of every human being, freedom of thought and expression and the respect of other’s opinions. Through these sessions the participants are encouraged to continue their exchange on values in the informal moments.

Educational flow

Acquiring or improving competences is a complex learning process which goes further than offering a set of chronologic workshops. Therefore, it is important to plan educational pathways throughout the full length of a learning programme. In this way the learning content offered can be built-up in a constructive and logical way, nurturing the growth of the targeted competences.

The educational flow should foster open-ended learning when dealing with complex problems. Often there is not one solution, but a variety of solutions to these problems. Ensuring that young people can develop their own solutions helps them to develop self-confidence to express opinions, critical thinking, openness to differences in opinions and respect for diversity. Learning through experience is an effective way to tackle the development of these more complex skills and attitudes. Therefore, the experiential learning cycle should be reflected in the learning programme. Within experiential learning, the learners actively participate in the learning programme. The oratory criterion offers the learners a supportive environment which encourages them to take responsibilities for the activities and processes they are involved in. If an individual or the group expresses the need to address a certain issue, the educational flow should be adapted within the limitation of the objectives of the training programme. Finally, the learning programme should promote the correct use of theoretical backgrounds. Within every competence there are elements of knowledge. The educational flow should integrate these, offering them to the learners with respect for the non-formal learning process.

As our educational methodology aims to motivate young people to put their learning experience into praxis in their local communities, the educational flow should accommodate this process. Within the themes of our network we work on subjects such as general human rights, children rights, citizenship, democracy, environment, religion, gender, health, social entrepreneurship, migration, peace, work, globalisation,... When building a learning pathway through a learning programme we start with learning 'about' the subject. This means that we develop a knowledge framework, which forms a basic body of knowledge required to deal with the subject. It should also offer the learner the opportunity to extend and deepen the understanding of the subject in future learning processes. Next we include learning actions which allows the learner to learn 'through' the subject. The learner needs to apply the knowledge framework to analyse concrete situations, including how the learner is related to it and which standpoint the learner takes towards the situation. Finally, we include learning actions 'for' the subject, which develops the competences of learners to apply what they've learned into their lives and to take action, alone or with others, for addressing the issues raised by the subject in their local communities.

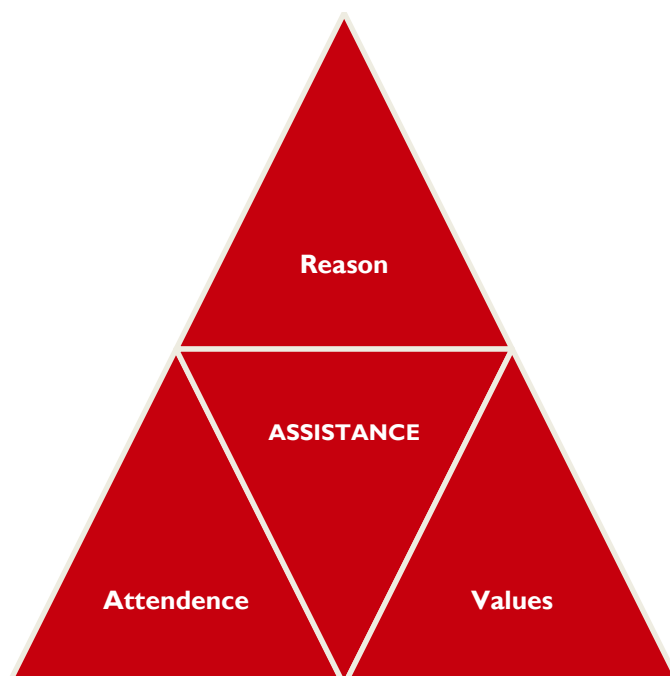
Assistance

In the historical overview the educational system of Don Bosco was identified as “the Preventive System”. Within this system, the approach of the educator is of the uppermost importance. The preventive system stands or falls by the manner in which it is implemented by the educator. The Don Bosco educator guides the learning process of young people at their own pace. Therefore, the concept of “assistance” can be defined as the working style of a Don Bosco educator.

Before continuing, it is important to define the meaning of educator. Within Don Bosco Youth-Net, everyone who has the responsibility to cater for young people is considered as an educator. He or she can be paid staff or volunteer; he or she can be a young person or an adult.

A Don Bosco educator works within a “learning environment” shaped by the Oratory criterion. This can be a physical place like a youth centre or a school, as well an activity like a training course or a voluntary service. It will accommodate young people with a place for company and entertainment where they can explore values and beliefs, look for the limits of their opportunities and where they are allowed to learn from their own mistakes by trial and error.

Having defined the educator and his working environment, we can come to the core of the educators working style: the “**Assistance**” of young people. Within assistance the educator should have eye for the group as well as for the individual, focusing on those young people who need the most attention, without forgetting about the group. Attendance, Reason and Values are 3 key elements in assistance:



Attendance

In the first place, attendance means to be actively present: the educator is among young people and takes parts in their daily life, during moments of education and reflection and during games. However, active attendance is not sufficient; the attitude is also important in this. Often ‘small things’ matter, such as remembering someone’s name, approaching people and showing interest.

We identify 7 attitudes which demonstrate Attendance:

Authenticity	Being a Don Bosco Educator is not just a technique. Young people will identify instantly if an educator is “playing a role” or is authentic. Only with this honest approach to education, will young people accept an educator.
Trust	A Don Bosco Educator trusts the young people to be able to build their own future. This growth of trust is a two-way process though – with the young person becoming able to trust in the educator and hopefully to learn to trust in others too. Such trust is often fragile, so the educator should consciously protect it, because it can also be a solid basis for education.
Approachable	A Don Bosco Educator does not take on the role of autocratic disciplinarian, but is an accessible and approachable person, who cares for the young person – being able to dialogue and create a mutual relationship.
Concern	Without imposing himself, a Don Bosco educator is actively present in the places where young people are. You can only learn what really matters for young people when you are actively among them.
Sincere Interest	A Don Bosco educator is sincerely interested in the happiness and the life of the young. They are happy when things go well and worry when things go less well.
Full of life	A Don Bosco educator loves to be with young people and participates as fully as possible in their activities.
Unconditional	A Don Bosco educator is actively present without any pre-conditions, does not attach conditions to the efforts of young people and does not expect that they owe him or her something, because he is educating or guiding them. Young people are accepted as they are, should know that will not be turned away when they make a mistake.

Reason

Don Bosco educators associate with young people in a reasonable way. This means for instance, that they do not behave in an authoritative manner and do not decide on any overly harsh rules or sanctions. It also means that they do not impose false expectations, but indicate what they think is acceptable and why. They should approach young people with reason, explain clearly their motives and plans, be confident that young people can be reasonable and are able to bear responsibility themselves, respect a young person and his or her opinion, even when it is a different one.

We identify 7 attitudes which demonstrate Reason:

Positive reinforcement	One of the major tasks of a Don Bosco educator is to encourage young people in their ongoing development. It requires attention to and recognition of young people’s achievements, and positively challenging them.
Affinity to youth culture	Starting from the concrete world of youth, by integrating their interests and addressing their stage of development, the Don Bosco Educator adjusts educational actions responding to the needs of the individual young person or youth group.
Realism	The Don Bosco Educator is optimistic; they have a sense of what is feasible in the practice of achieving one’s educational goals.
Flexibility	The Don Bosco Educator is always open to new ideas and change, and is challenged to respond one’s own behaviour to the needs and expectations of the young people.
Adaptability	Respecting and accepting difficulties affecting the learning process, the Don Bosco Educator is adaptable to individual and external challenges.
Patience	The Don Bosco Educator is patient. It is their role to identify and respond always to the needs of youth and to take the lead in facilitating their learning process.
Rational	The Don Bosco Educator is reasonable regarding rules and demands, basing them not on sentimental or emotional motives, but on the principles of the preventive system, thus safeguarding the intended learning process.

Values

As ‘education’ per definition is rooted in the cultural context and its values in which it is developed, educating within intercultural settings provides certain challenges. The educator needs to create common ground from where to start a dialogue on values. For Don Bosco Educators this common ground is using education as an instrument promoting and protecting human dignity of all young people. Through our education we strive to create openness towards the diversity in society, by education young people to become good Christians and honest citizens. In order to offer this value-based education, a Don Bosco Educator should be a role model in this.

We identify 7 attitudes which demonstrate Values:

Sense of transcendence	Starting from the understanding that young people are dealing with the big questions in life, the Don Bosco Educator has the sensitivity to identify and to support young people in their search for meaning in their life.
Respect	The Don Bosco Educator is respectful towards others regardless of race, gender, age, nationality, class, sexuality, appearance, political belief, religious belief, physical or mental ability and acts accordingly.
Openness	The Don Bosco Educator is open to engage in dialogue and collaboration with others regardless of differences in values.
Kindness	The Don Bosco Educator instinctively is kind – showing good to others through thought, word and action.
Empathy	The Don Bosco Educator identifies the importance of understanding the viewpoint, situation and feeling of others.
Forgiveness	When the relationship between the Don Bosco Educator and young people is damaged, it is imperative that the educator reaches out to the other, letting go of any personal feelings of hurt and upset.
Optimism	The Don Bosco Educator emphasises the positive sides of all situations, is not discouraged by any difficulties, always looking with hope for a positive outcome.

“Good Christians and Honest Citizens”

Don Bosco’s aim was to transform the disadvantaged young people he was working with into “Good Christians and Honest Citizens”. But how to interpret this aphorism in the present-day reality of Don Bosco Youth-Net?

Don Bosco’s educational system stems from his religious education, his spirituality. Over the centuries, the educational style of Don Bosco has shown itself to be of great relevance in diverse religious traditions, in multicultural contexts and in secularised environments. Nowadays, not all Don Bosco educators work from a religious faith. However, this does not mean that the evangelical character of Don Bosco’s educational system has disappeared; on the contrary, it lives on in the style of working, the personal encouragement and strengthening of each other. Don Bosco read the gospel from a certain point of view: that of a merciful God that does not let His people down. By dedicating himself to young people unconditionally, Don Bosco wanted to live the gospel.

Compassion and an unconditional approach can still be found in Don Bosco projects. At the same time, the Don Bosco Movement enters into a respectful dialogue with other religions and philosophies of life and it realises that every human being, irrespective of his view of faith or belief, struggles with spiritual questions and looks for sources of inspiration. Through entering in this dialogue we receive the opportunity to develop a better awareness of our own Christian identity. This awareness of one’s own identity is an essential premise for any serious dialogue. We interpret and adapt the Christian elements of our educational system, applying the system of **Human Rights** which are recognised **as universal value basis** for safeguarding human dignity, to accommodate this dialogue. As such we demonstrate a wholesome humanism which serves as the basis for our educational system. In this way we apply our educational system in different contexts, reaching out to all young people in harmony with present sensitivities.

“We are educators, not activists” is another familiar aphorism within the Don Bosco Movement. The aphorism is not a statement against activism, but it tries to make clear that we follow another path to social change. Activism calls upon social change through political action. The educational approach differs as its priority focus lies with children and young people. Through offering competence-based learning within a value-based framework, education has the power to shape the future society by preventing past and present injustice. In this way education becomes a tool to fight for the dignity of each young person. Our educational system does not only transfer personal and professional competences young people need to build a life of autonomy, but offers them a value-basis as well. As such it encourages them **to take an active role as citizens** in creating a fair and welcoming society for all.

Therefore, Don Bosco Youth-Net aims at making a difference for young people involved in our network, assisting them in their growth towards a life of autonomy, shaping a more just society for all, through their active participation in their local communities.

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Notes



International network
represented in
16 European countries



www.donboscoyouth.net

Austria	JUGEND EINE WELT	Don Bosko centar Podgorica	Montenegro
Austria	SALESIANER DON BOSCOS	SPYS	Malta
Belgium	BOSCO BASE Jeugdwerk Don Bosco	Wdm	Poland
Czech Republic	SADBA	DOMKA	Slovakia
France	MSJ Mouvement Salésien des Jeunes FRANCE & BELGIQUE-SUD	mladinski CEE	Slovenia
Germany	Aktionszentrum Benediktbeuern	Confe Don Bosco	Spain
Italy	Salesiani per il sociale	Don Bosco Youthnet Nederland	The Netherlands
Italy	Turismo Giovanile e Sociale	DON BOSCO UKRAINE	Ukraine
Ireland	SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IRELAND	Don Bosco 1815 - 2015	United Kingdom

... and still growing!

Mission statement DBYN

We, the partners of Don Bosco Youth-Net, wish to contribute to the total development of all young people by bringing them together through various international activities. We hereby look to broaden the opportunities for these young people who are, through various reasons, excluded. By concrete activities of co-operation, we wish to be a living example of tolerance and mutual understanding.

Through our own Salesian identity, we aim to keep the heritage of Don Bosco alive and look to offer a 'youthful voice' in the Europe of today. By doing this, we want to make a real difference in the lives of all young people, especially for those most in need.