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*To All Members of the Society of Mary and
To Those in Leadership of All Works of the Society of Mary*



STRENGTHENING MARIANIST EDUCATION THROUGH GLOBAL COMPACT ON EDUCATION

The importance of right questions and right criteria

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1. Introduction

As we have highlighted it from the beginning, the call to establish a *Global Compact on Education Pact* (GCE) is an opportunity for us to broaden and deepen our pedagogical and pastoral vision. It "*oblige us to look further, deeper and wider*" in order to achieve an education that "*influences the heart of a society and gives birth to a new culture*"¹ in which all collaborate to build a different world.

Such a perspective makes us perceive the GCE not in quantitative terms, but in qualitative² terms, targeting the heart and meaning of what we do. Consequently, it invites us to engage in a process of discernment and revision with a view toward strengthening our fidelity to our educational charism. An honest and in-depth analysis of our educational practices is therefore necessary to guide our renewal processes and projects.

An international symposium organized on October 18 and 19, 2022, by Zoom, enabled all our Marianist educational institutions around the world to take stock of this new "sign of the times". An international team of Marianist educators, led by the Assistants General for Education of the SM and FMI, carried out a comparative analysis of the convergences, divergences and new ideas that appears by placing the Characteristics of Marianist Education (CME) and GCE commitments side by side. You can find out more by clicking [HERE](#). You'll then see your text under the heading: "***Comparison of the Global Compact on Education and the Characteristics of Marianist Education***".

Clearly, the GCE reflects the needs and demands of our time and has become the new compass guiding Catholic education today. We Marianists, despite an educational tradition stretching back over 200 years, cannot remain on the sidelines of these contemporary calls. By tuning in to the Pope's call and engaging in frank and courageous dialogue with one another, we will succeed in making our educational offering a *Kairos*, that is, an opportune moment to enlighten and improve our educational institutions?

¹ Fr. André Fétis, SM, Superior General. Presentation at the International Symposium on Marianist Education, October 18-19, 2022, by zoom.

² It is not necessarily a question of doing more things; rather it is a question of doing in a new way what we are already doing - better or differently, if needed.

This issue of *SM 3 Offices* puts together the essential reflections of the moment on this long process that may lead to the renewal of the Catholic school in general, and of Marianist education in particular. The importance of having the right questions and right criteria is underlined; but also, and above all, that of the *new educational paradigm* at stake.

2. A Question of Horizons and of a New Educational Paradigm

For education to be a beacon of hope, it must be able to open up horizons and generate paradigms capable of responding to the urgent needs of the moment.

In terms of horizons to be opened up, Pope Francis proposes three: "*starting afresh from the human person*", "*rethinking the way we think*" and "*developing solidarity*". These three horizons point to the paradigm of **fraternity and care** as a key. Since different realities are often interconnected, this paradigm is highly conducive to the realization of "*integral ecology*", in that it invites us to care for people and the common home. The "*paradigm of care*" is opposed to the "*paradigm of competition*", which may emphasize a culture of success that can exclude others, exalt personal power, and give rise to the perceived need for accumulation and consumption!

The "*paradigm of care*" is based on win-win interactions at all levels: political, economic, social, cultural, emotional, and spiritual. It is certainly not a type of interaction that is easy to establish, but it is the one that ensures everyone's survival. It is a difficult challenge to meet, given the current industrial model of education in most of our countries. In such an industrial model, the key is standardization and assessment based on selective objectives that often leave some students on the sidelines.

The *Global Compact on Education*, on the other hand, calls for a model centered on people, with the aim of ensuring that each and every one of them can progress, and that no one is left behind. It is a model that unites inclusion with academic and human excellence. It has only one constant - the *integral growth of each person* through the learning they are called upon to do - but with two variables, which are *time* and *personalized support*, because some people need more time and more guidance than others.

Personalized attention and evaluation based on educational objectives are a key element in this new paradigm. The expected result is effective accompaniment of each person's uniqueness in relation to others. This represents something that is impossible in a system determined by excessive competition.

3. The Importance of Asking the Right Questions

3.1. Three trends to avoid: Paralysis, Complaisance, and Superficial Compliance.

The path leading to the renewal implied by the "*paradigm of care*" will not be without its bumps and resistance, linked on the one hand to the educational policies of our mission countries, and on the other to our own habits and traditions. Faced with such pressure, there are three possible tendencies: paralysis, complaisance, or superficial compliance.

Paralysis is the attitude of doing nothing because of the complexity of the subject, and therefore of letting things go as they have always been. *Complaisance*, a tendency close to the first, places us in a state of self-satisfaction that prevents critical evaluation and necessary questioning. Finally, *superficial compliance* can lead us to nominally follow GCE's calls, simply because of the novelty it represents, but not letting them truly inform our actions. In all three cases, the final result is inertia that leads nowhere!

If, instead, we recognize in these calls a necessary requirement for updating, in line with the needs of contemporary society, then it will be possible for us to exercise, with courage and lucidity, a discernment that will contribute to the construction of a "new humanism." This presupposes knowing how to ask the right questions that will enable us to eliminate certain things and/or do others differently.

3.2. The right questions

These are essential to any evaluation and transformation. And the better they are, the better the chance to find the right answers. "*A person who lives only by answers is accustomed to closing, while a person who lives by questions is accustomed to opening*", Pope Francis told the young people at Camp Alpha in the summer of 2022, before adding "*God loves questions*". The history of our foundations and the

beginnings of our Marianist mission clearly confirm this logic, which holds that education is not first and foremost a matter of methods, but of objectives based on right questions, because whoever has a "motive" always finds the "method."

The new educational paradigm, mentioned above, explains the "*motive*" of education and its need for renewal today. And because Marianist education is concerned by the topic, it too will want to examine how it can strengthen itself by drawing on its tradition, but also taking into account the needs of the present age. The path to this end will depend on the ability to ask the right questions, however difficult and disturbing they may be. And for these questions to lead to "the right answers", it will be necessary to have the right criteria, coherent with the Marianist educational vision and shared with the entire world educational community.

Among the questions that may arise for Marianist education today, the following three may be fundamental.

- What should we keep from among what has been done so far?
- What should we creatively rethink and renew?
- What should we abandon?

4. Criteria for the renewal of the Education

The criteria we mention here are of two types: inter-institutional and Marianist. The *inter-institutional criteria* are those shared by all religious institutions, and which can guide the choices leading to the renewal and reinforcement of Catholic education. *Marianist criteria*, while consistent with the above, are based on our own charism and tradition.

4.1. Inter-institutional criteria

Among the most significant, the UISG-USG³ Education Commission has identified six⁴. These are:

- *appreciative and relational leadership,*
- *pedagogy of care,*
- *integral accompaniment,*
- *setting up teams,*
- *knowledge and skills,*
- *spiritual competence and pastoral action.*

In collaboration with Catholic institutions around the world, these criteria can make a renewal of Catholic education a reality. Below is a brief overview of each criterion.

a) **Appreciative and relational leadership**: Our educational institutions need leadership founded on human relationships and service, and based on recognition, patient listening, esteem and co-responsibility. *"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and servant of all"* (Mk 9:30-37).

b) **Pedagogy of care** ». *Fratelli Tutti*, n°77, best sums up what's at stake in this criterion when it says: *"Today, we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment."*

c) **Integral accompaniment**. A Catholic institution is concerned with ensuring that everyone, whether learner or educator, receives personal, personalized support, combining inclusion, friendliness, and fair demands. *"So Jesus went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight"* (Luke 24, 13-35).

d) **Setting up teams**. *"Together is the word that saves all and accomplishes all."* affirms Pope Francis. Selecting and training the people who will be part of our educational project is fundamental. Helping the team members to demonstrate their

³ This commission works under the aegis of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG: for female congregations) and the Union of Superiors General (USG: for male congregations)

⁴ It was on the occasion of its annual seminar from October 13-15, 2022.

professionalism and to work in collaboration with families represents greater value in the life of our institutions.

e) **Knowledge and skills (for inclusion and human excellence)**. This criterion is concerned with curriculum content, which must be defined on a solid foundation of essential learning, guaranteeing inclusion and a global approach which facilitates interdisciplinary and intercultural education, as well as an integrated ecological understanding of humanity. *"There are not two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but a single, complex socio-environmental crisis"*. (LS 139).

f) **Spiritual competence and pastoral action**. Pastoral care and religious education are the mainstays of Catholic educational institutions and must be conducted in a language that is comprehensible and accessible to all those involved. *"Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my inner relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth."* (LS 70)

There is no doubt that *"the highest point of education is the transcendent dimension."*⁵ Educators cannot, therefore, shirk their duty to proclaim the truth about God. *"Not to speak the truth about God out of respect for those who do not believe would be, in the field of education, like burning books out of respect for those who are not intellectuals, destroying works of art out of respect for those who do not see, or silencing music out of respect for those who do not hear."*⁶ And for our institutions, Formation in values must be consistent with the pedagogy of Jesus Christ.

4.2. Marianist Criteria

The call to base transformative education on a "culture of care" is rooted in our Marianist tradition. This tradition has known great models of educators who knew how to take a child by the hand and lead him towards a new horizon of possibilities, with love, closeness, measured demands and determination.

Father André Fétis urges us⁷ to reread Pope Francis' inspiration from a Marianist perspective. He wants us to pay attention to the Marianist anthropological principle

⁵ Pope Francis, October 5, 2021, to representatives of world religions invited to Rome.

⁶ Pope Francis, June 1, 2022, to participants at the International Conference on the Global Compact Education.

⁷ Intervention at the International Symposium on Marianist Education, October 18-19, 2022, by zoom.

that enables an "*educational articulation... nourished by the presence of Mary and which places Christ at the center*". This principle underlines two fundamental criteria that can guide, in a specific way, the renewal of our education. These are:

1 - on the one hand, to use our educational works as centers for proclaiming and spreading the message and the person of Jesus.

2- on the other hand, to educate people to be capable of faith, like Mary, that is, capable of listening, opening up to others and responding with commitment. Our education must help people to live their lives as a vocation, in other words, a response to a call that comes from outside themselves and invites them to commit to an endeavor in relation to other people.

Thus, the criteria emerging from our Marianist identity provide a fitting complement to what is at the heart of the inter-institutional criteria!

5. Applying the chosen criteria

Starting from the new educational paradigm, that of "*care*", and based on the criteria highlighted above, we can address the three fundamental questions that emerged early, namely:

- What should we keep from among what has been done so far?
- What should we creatively rethink and renew?
- What should we abandon?

The answers to a given question can generate a cascade of other, more numerous and perhaps more difficult questions. But, as we said earlier, "the right questions are essential" if we are to move forward. We must therefore also accept those questions that don't allow for answers "right away" or "at all"; these can be stimulating challenges but facing them will prevent us from sinking into complacency without any future.

5.1. Examples of answers to these questions

We would now like to offer a few examples of answers designed to illustrate how we might approach these three questions by applying them to the fields of ***organization***, ***curricula***, ***pastoral action***, etc. All the proposed answers remain on the *theoretical* level and do not relate to any particular Unit. Each Unit's Assistant for Education may draw inspiration from them to reflect on his own reality, given that no local reality is totally similar to another.

5.1.1. What should we keep from among what has been done so far?

There are many elements of our Marianist educational practice that present obvious convergences with the commitments of the *Global Compact on Education* and that should not be lost. Here are a few indicative examples that do not target any particular Marianist work.

a) At organizational levels

- Respect and apply the governance of our works according to the spirit of the Three Offices, which calls on the diversified skills of people, takes reality into account so as not to lose any aspect of it, and always leads to balanced, thorough, and prudent decisions⁸.
- “Family spirit, the ability to create communities and networks of fraternities wherever we are, has always been, and continues to be, one of our strengths.” (General Chapter 2001, §24c). Family spirit reflects not only the leadership of those in charge, but also the commitment of every member of the educational community to making their institution a second family, where everyone feels expected, loved, respected, and appreciated.

b) At pedagogical and curricula levels

- The pursuit of an integral quality education based on curricula and programs that develop the whole person in all his dimensions. We must recognize that transforming pedagogical practices that are subject to and conditioned by the educational systems of our respective countries, particularly in terms of methodology and curriculum content, will always remain a challenge. Not losing sight of this challenge can be a stimulus to continuous improvement.

⁸ Cf. n°59, Assuring the Marianist Identity of our apostolic works, General Administration. Rome, 2018.

c) At the level of pedagogical and pastoral action

- Continue with our "Marian style of education", marked by its humanizing, welcoming and lovable character, where the other, the student in this case, is not a mere number, and where the discovery of Jesus as "*good news*" is possible and proposed to all.
- Our works must remain places which are "fruitful in fruits of justice and peace, solidarity and respect for creation", where the spiritual and personal life of each individual is always nourished, and the sense of integral ecology cultivated.

5.1.2. What do we need to creatively rethink and renew?

Unlike the first question, which aims to identify and preserve the assets we have, this second question invites us to highlight practices that could be creatively improved. And in a theoretical way, as we have done previously, we would like to highlight the following, without specific reference to a given Marianist work.

a) At organizational levels

- Consider opening up our educational works to all children, looking creatively for ways to reach out and include the poor. In certain places and circumstances, in fact, particular situations have transformed us into "exclusive institutions" that are difficult for the poorest to access. Solutions should exist to prevent us from being locked into a category of privileged children, who certainly also need our education, but not exclusively them!
- Where this is not yet the case, create structures within our works that respond to the real needs of learners, while at the same time enabling them to participate in the life of the institution.
- Promote the development of intercultural Marianist webinars at national, regional and/or global level, where projects for the renewal and improvement of our educational work are shared, as well as itineraries for identity and mission formation.

b) At Pedagogical and curricula levels

- Even when our work is subject to the demands of governments, we try to go beyond the exclusive pursuit of academic excellence so that the educational years afford our students knowledge and skills for their transition to work, training for citizenship, cooperative participation in public policy, the 'science-faith-culture' dialogue, etc.

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- Promote the use of technology as a means to serve Marianist educational objectives, in keeping with the demands of the contemporary world.
 - As far as possible, stimulate reflection and develop a "Marianist institutional" curriculum that includes objectives and fundamental skills for educating the person in an integral and committed way.

c) At the level of Pedagogical and pastoral action

- Where it doesn't yet exist, incorporate the "pedagogy of care" as a transversal element of our education, by creating spaces for listening to and accompanying people (educators and educated), as well as service and volunteering that give our graduates an "outgoing profile".
- To make pastoral action and religious education the mainstays of school life, where the cultivation of interiority and self-knowledge during school and extra-curricular activities are an unavoidable part of training.
- To help our students find their vocation, not only academically, but also personally, professionally, and religiously.

d) Networking

- Become "outgoing schools", willing to work with other schools, whether Christian or not, and open to those around them, to the parish, to civil movements, etc.
- Develop, through common projects and specific meetings, the Marianist Educational Network as a space of reference, collaborative learning and spiritual communion; this could include, for example, a worldwide prayer network between all our Marianist educational communities.

5.1.3. What should we abandon?

From our Marianist education, we have just emphasized that there are aspects that we absolutely must preserve, and that there are others that leave room for improvement. Welcoming GCE calls can also lead us to identify aspects that need to be abandoned. The following examples, applicable here and there, could fall into this category.

a) At organizational levels

- Stop making tuition fees a barrier to access to our institutions for all. This could lead to a cascade of other issues linked to the survival needs of our institutions, where, due to a lack of support from the public authorities, we aim to survive by

any means necessary. We can even come to the point of giving up caring for those who need us most, because we need money to stay afloat, and they don't have any. But easily accepting such a situation wouldn't be a way of renouncing our *raison d'être* and evangelical principles? But are there really any other ways out?

- Stop negative and excessive competition between educators, between schools, between congregations, etc., to improve collaboration and multiply opportunities to work together.

b) At Pedagogical and curricula levels

- Abandon the encyclopedic approach to education, in consultation and alliance with the Ministry of Education.
- Abandon compartmentalized, rigid curricula that are sometimes far removed from reality. But one obvious question this choice would raise is this: as a religious institution, do we really have the power to transform a pedagogical practice that is subject to and conditioned by our countries' education systems, particularly in this area of curriculum content, work methodology and assessment?

c) At Pedagogical and pastoral action levels

- Stop being passive spectators of our pupils' and students' problems. The first thing to do when a learner is having trouble with his or her life should not be to simply send him/her to a psychologist, but to give him/her practical support and take care of them.
- Eliminate negative language and judgments about learners, as well as stereotyped concepts of the roles of men and women, at all levels, including during the school and academic years.
- Stop destroying nature and the environment by cultivating and encouraging, right from school, simple gestures that promote "*care taking attitudes*".

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5. 2. Application to the reality of each Unit

The answers given above are deliberately kept generic, because the General Administration, as such, has no particular work to administer. But the Units do! So, let us consider the concrete reality within each Unit?

We invite every Assistant for Education to take up the three questions raised, and analyze his own reality, either globally or by institution:

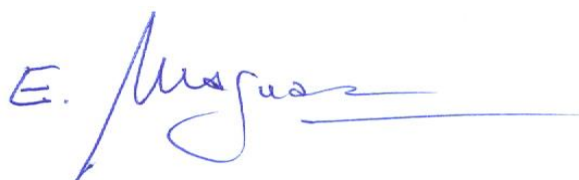
- a) What should we keep from among what has been done so far in my Unit?
- b) What should be creatively rethought?
- c) What should be abandoned?

For each question, and for each of the three important areas in the life of your educational institutions (Organization, Curriculum, Pedagogical and Pastoral Action), the Assistant for Education will highlight at least one aspect. He can draw inspiration from the examples given above.

In addition to the Assistants for Education of the Units, any Marianist educator (religious or lay collaborator) who wishes to do so can also make this analysis and send us their reflections and comments until October 12, 2023. To send your reflections and comments, please click [HERE](#) and then select your communication language.

Fraternally,

Essodomna Maximin Magnan, SM



Assistant General for Education

Rome, June 22, 2023