

INNOVATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MARIST MISSION

**MESSAGE FROM THE MARIST
INTERNATIONAL MISSION COMMISSION**





A MARIST EDUCATION FOR OUR TIME

We live in a time of profound transformation, of intense speed and interdependence in relationships. The advance of digital and communication technologies at the beginning of this century is marked by hyperconnectivity, accompanied by increasingly complex social, economic, political and environmental changes. Innovation, in these dynamic circumstances in which life presents itself, is no longer an option, but a necessity.

The Marist Institute, in its more than 200 years of history, has always sought to act in the light of the needs of each time and context. This has been the case since Marcellin Champagnat, when the founder sensed that the pedagogy practised in the post-revolutionary cantons of France did not correspond to reality. In this same spirit, the concerns of the contemporary world make us reflect on how the learnings of the Marist path enable us to follow the mission in search of the best answers for our children, our young people and our adults.

We have dedicated ourselves to developing concepts and methodologies ori-

ented to quality and excellence; to designing detailed processes aimed at ensuring the best delivery, systematising good practices, measuring results, reducing risks, identifying and correcting errors. We also learned about continuous improvement in which errors and opportunities reorient processes.

During this period, educational institutions all over the world dedicated themselves to the search for excellence by building quality pedagogical proposals, aligned to their time and guided by consistent processes. However, the challenge that remained was to provide access to different communities and social realities to the new educational models.

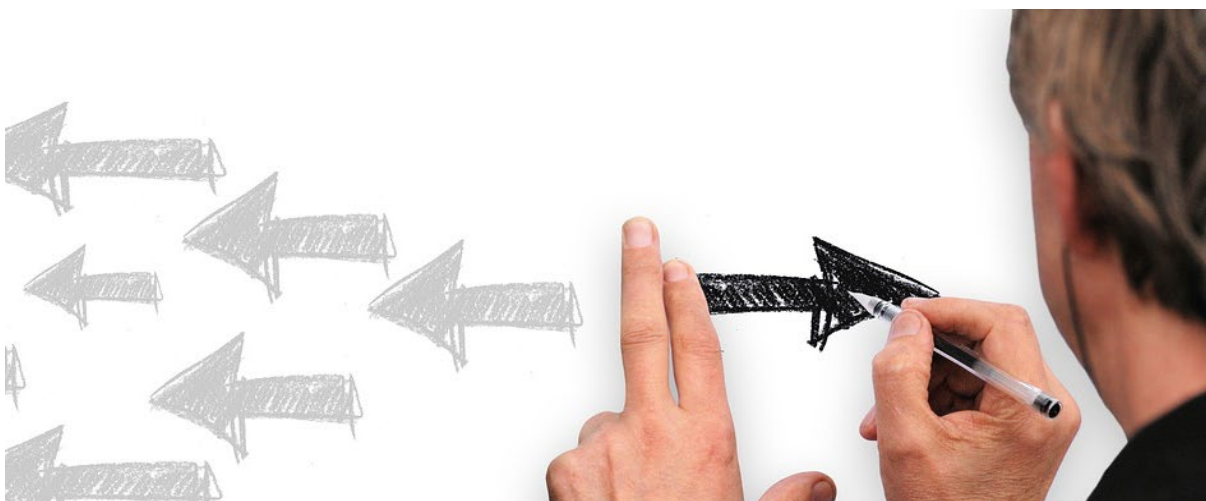
Attentive to the challenges of inclusive education, the Marist mission has faced with the same responsibility the search for the promotion of a more just and fraternal society. The commitment to quality delivery, associated with core values, has positioned Marist initiatives at the highest standard of technical excellence and social relevance. However, the emerging technological possibilities, the new ways of teaching and learning, as well as the ephemerality of the solutions found, place before us the challenge of renewing resources, innovating methodologies and expanding inclusion in different dimensions.

CONTEMPORARY REALITY

We have arrived at the knowledge and communication society with important learnings, but also with instabilities characteristic of a change of era. The acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) seems to describe the challenges of the last decade. However, given the sense of urgency imposed on us by the pandemic, the term FANI (fragile, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible) has come to be considered more appropriate to characterise the moment. In this context, predicting how the future will be designed, from the linear model we exercised in past decades, becomes an almost impossible task.

The legacy of Marist pedagogy, marked by excellence and commitment to promoting a better world, is valuable for the development of people with a critical awareness of themselves and their role in this new world. However, the BANI world has given us clear signs that we can (and need to!) move forward. Champagnat has inspired us to act boldly and to be prepared to give pioneering answers. The instability of the new times brings us challenges; on the other hand, it is also full of opportunities for those who have the audacity to innovate.





WHAT IS INNOVATION?

Beyond a “fashionable” term, widely disseminated, what does it actually mean to innovate? Originating from the Latin word “innovare”, it means “to renew, to change”. Innovation, sometimes confused with invention, goes beyond the creation of something new. Innovating means promoting a change in the way of thinking and acting, with the aim of developing solutions outside an already known pattern. The trigger for innovation is the identification and exploration of challenges that, when solved, generate an expressive positive impact. If we look closely at this concept, we will see how innovative the Marist educational proposal was when it emerged. Champagnat did not create a pedagogy. He knew, instead, how to regroup techniques and methods under a new prism and purpose: education with affection and closer to the Gospel. Over time, this pedagogical proposal gained theoretical rigour based on new ways of thinking and acting, which today we would characterise as innovative.

Innovation can be considered radical or incremental based on the transformation it is capable of generating. Radical innovation is associated with disruption, with a change that causes discontinuity of the previous solution, generating new relationships between people. Incremental innovation, on the other hand, does not bring about a change in the essence of the solution or in the relationships between the parties. It is aimed at improving and optimising functions or the way deliveries are made, but it should not be confused with continuous improvement, as it generates impact and promotes transformation.

Innovation as we approach it today had its origin associated with science and industry in the 19th century, in the context of the Industrial Revolution, linked to a linear process of developing new products. The concept has evolved. It is no longer possible to innovate in a linear way. It is necessary to incorporate the influence of the context, the risk of an uncertain environment and the complexity of interconnected realities. Regardless of the degree of impact or the context in which it is inserted, successful innovation will always be associated with a collaborative process, centred on creativity and the courage of people to act. And today, in recognizing ourselves as a global charismatic family, we Marists of Champagnat are invited, in the light of the XXII General Chapter, to act in a collaborative, interdependent and networked way. “Interdependence, rather than isolation or independence, must be the new normal for us.” (INSTITUTE OF MARIST BROTHERS, 2017, p. 7).





NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE RISKS

The intense dynamic of innovation leads us, then, to reflect: how can we promote movements of change in an increasingly complex world? How can our pedagogical proposal provoke the formation of people in our mission spaces?

The pandemic has given greater visibility to the complex social/educational problems in different countries and in different realities where we are engaged on Marist mission. At the same time, the pandemic has put a magnifying glass on relationships and highlighted the resilience of society as well as the educational community. We drifted apart, but quickly managed to reconnect. As we return to the face-to-face, opportunities that seemed distant are being addressed as a priority. This is the best time to innovate!

We have already seen that innovation is not simply restricted to doing things differently, nor to the simple adoption of new technologies. The very advance of digital technologies and the almost unlimited access to information has destabilised traditional teaching models, creating countless challenges and, at the same time, opening up countless new opportunities.

COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Stimulating the development of critical thinking, provoking solutions through non-obvious paths and preparing people to act in complex scenarios become core competences to be pursued. What does not change in the new world is the value that bonding represents in the education process. Keeping the community involved and engaged in an exploratory learning process involves building an environment of trust where boldness also makes room for uncertainties to be debated, mistakes to be made and corrected, questioning and hypotheses to be raised.

Collaborative action is undoubtedly essential to identify relevant problems and, obviously, to generate innovative solutions. Our presence in more than 80 countries, aligned with converging values, allows the Marist mission to explore the diversity and richness of different visions, which significantly expands the innovative potential for the generation of high-impact solutions.

Marcellin Champagnat taught us to look at our neighbour, to be attentive to the context that surrounds us and, with audacity and courage, to direct our capacities and energy to promote transformation. Education is the pillar that connects us and directs us in our Marist mission. The action that we propose to



undertake is, guided by solid processes in the search for quality and excellence in our initiatives, and closely aligned with the dimension of human formation, which is complex, requires systematic thinking and, above all, demands collaboration, sensitivity and a sense of humanity. Such a sense is urgent, as Pope Francis has well signalled in different documents. In our mission area, it is worthwhile to increasingly immerse ourselves in the proposals of the Global Educational Pact and respond with responsibility, hope and boldness.

The entrepreneurial trajectory of the Marist mission points out to us the fundamental elements to advance in a process of consistent innovation, capable of giving continuity to the search for a more just and fraternal world. Thus, the relevance of the Marist mission and the teachings of Marcellin Champagnat will remain alive in the promotion of a better world.

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On behalf of the Marist International Mission Commission.

If you wish to share your ideas, reflections or experiences with the Commission as a result of these messages, you can write to the email fms.cimm@fms.it

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