

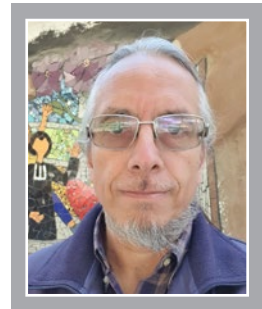
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## Leadership: the warp and woof of an educational journey

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“Our Institute should aim towards a more flexible process, where decision-making is shared”.  
(Marist Voices, cap.14 - Br. Robert Teoh)

Br. Juan Carlos Robles Gil Torres  
Education, pastoral ministry,  
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I have been a Marist Brother for 32 years and have been involved in various forms of education in diverse contexts, such as rural schools, schools for indigenous groups and out-of-school activities, throughout my journey as a Marist, but always with a profoundly pastoral approach. Currently, I am the Principal of a multi-level school of 1450 students in the Marist Province of Central Mexico. In addition, I serve as Vice Provincial and Provincial Councilor and am a member of the Commission for Economic Affairs, as well as of a charity that supports schools for young people in rural communities.

There are three images with which I have identified as a Marist Brother-educator throughout my life:

The warp: that is the base or support through which the weft of a fabric can be formed.

The voyage - a term with three aspects to its meaning: distance, time and course. It is the word used to define the direction taken by a ship and the distance covered in a day. Finally, the way, an aspect with a meaning dating back to the origins of our humanity when it moved towards new horizons in search of food, and to the name adopted by the first Christians as a self-identification as followers of Jesus: “followers of the Way”.

In these three images I can condense what it means to me to be a Marist educator and, even more, the meaning of the role of leadership to which I have been called from the early years of my involvement in Marist ministries.

Warp: The work of education implies the interweaving of different processes which, once set in motion, forms a net reflecting the potential of the individual, as well as his or her role in soci-

ety and the shaping of the demands of society itself. The basis of this framework is the warp, the threads that serve as a base for the fabric to be formed by the weft, which incorporates different colours and textures, bringing together threads and spaces.

The warp requires tight, well-defined threads. Educational ministry and even more so the work of leadership in this field requires clarity in the basics of the process. Some identify these with standards; I identify them with principles. It also necessarily involves incorporating into this work the participation and contribution of the student and/or fellow-workers, otherwise, the net, the person, the society formed, loses strength, structure, and, above all, meaning.

The following metaphor complements this allegory:

The voyage. The educational process involves setting out on a course to achieve specific objectives and recognizing what we have achieved within specific timeframes. In the same way, the educational journey implies being attentive to the changing vectors of the “social climate”, of the “currents of thought” (aerial or aquatic, i.e. ideological or material) coming from the experience of the students and of educational processes themselves as well as making reference, and paying specific attention, to the assumptions, ideals and/or principles on which we base our program. As with a sea voyage, in life, knowing from the appropriate reading of various pointers where we stand with reference to these processes is fundamental.

My experience as a leader in Marist education has been based on being convinced about recognizing and reminding teachers and students of the need to be attached to and linked with the warp, that is to say with the fundamental human and evangelical principles of freedom, equity and justice; to identify the voyage that the principles and guidelines based on the Marist charism imply: solidarity, fraternity and community, integrity, humility, love of work, creative presence, commitment, audacious foresight and contact with the source of all our action: God.

However, at the same time, we must be able to incorporate into the proposals we make the human fabric, that is to say, to embrace the characteristics of each and every one of the threads that intertwine and give shape to educational communities. In short, the attitudes that Mary embodied, and whom we are called to emulate in the following of Christ.

Acting in this way seems to me to be fundamental to the exercising of committed leadership,





not through fashionable ideas or perspectives, but through what people require: to be listened to and to be guided.

The way. There are many references to what it means to move forward with others in the educational journey as a metaphor and as a reality. I share just the following example.

While walking through the Chiapas jungle in the southeast of Mexico, I came across the following story by Carlos Lenkersdorf, which I will summarise: An anthropologist who wanted to learn the language of the Tojolabales (a native Mayan people), agreed that they would teach him Tojolabal if he taught them Spanish. When he wanted to evaluate the progress of his students, he gave them a test, giving each one a sheet of paper. They looked at each other, trying to understand and then, as one, they sat down and began to carry out the assessment together. At first, he indicated to them that this was not the right way to sit an exam, but then the anthropologist understood that for the Tojolabal people it makes no sense to solve a problem individually, since for them they were all affected by the same test, by the same problem.

The path that I learned during the scarce 9 years that I was able to spend living and working with the Tojolabal communities taught me that Marist educational leadership must be capable of changing or making its own perspective more flexible when the context requires it, if it really intends to strengthen educational programmes based on respect for the other.



The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Marist Institute.

If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to [fms.cimm@fms.it](mailto:fms.cimm@fms.it)