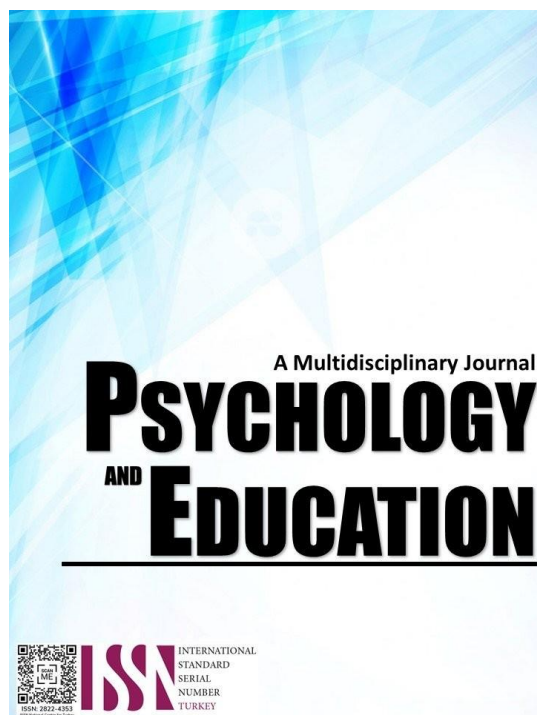


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PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

2023

Volume: 12

Pages: 524-529

Document ID: 2023PEMJ1079

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8260599

Manuscript Accepted: 2023-17-8

Teaching in the Marists Schools

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Abstract

This study on the teaching in the Marist schools is a descriptive qualitative design aimed to explore the lived-experiences of teachers in the Marist schools in the context of the Marist Pedagogy. It highlights the significant experiences of seven (7) educators who have been teaching in the Marist institute for years. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews. The data were coded and analyzed according to the research questions. The discussion and analysis of the data are presented in four parts. The first part describes the understanding of the Marist Pedagogy through the meaning manifestation and beliefs of the teachers about Marist way of teaching. The next part explained the teaching practices in the Marist Schools in terms of instructional delivery and classroom management. The attitudes of teachers towards their students, colleagues, and teaching in general had been discussed in the third part. Lastly, the challenges that the teachers had experienced in their teaching was highlighted in another part. The data from the in-depth interview which was analyzed through the process of thematic coding and categorization of the transcript revealed three (3) emergent themes that describe the Marist way of teaching based on the perspective of the Marist educators. These emergent themes are affirmations of the distinct practices of the teachers in the Marist schools. The study revealed that while teaching in the Marist schools is towards transcendental learning, it is also a pastoral responsibility and a shared mission.

Keywords: *marist education, marist pedagogy, shared mission, transcendental learning, qualitative research*

Introduction

For over two centuries of providing education opportunities around the world, the Marist Brothers and their lay mission partners have been active in teaching Christian faith through the charism of its founder, St. Marcellin Champagnat who wanted to provide students not only with the skills needed to be productive citizens but an awareness and understanding of the great love of Jesus through Mary (Rolfe, 2016). The Marists were identified by the teachings of Champagnat. From the beginning, Marist Schools reflected many of the qualities of Marcellin himself; they were placed where hard work and excellence were valued, places where individuals were genuinely loved, warm places where strong family spirit was evident, places characterized not by a lack of misinterpretation but rather through presence and simplicity (Mohamad, 2016). While sharing a vision with many, especially in Church circles, the Marists use a distinctive pedagogical approach which Marcellin and the first Marists initiated and which was innovative in many of its aspects (Article 97, In the Footsteps of Marcellin). These distinct Marist traditions have been greatly experienced by learners who have been educated in the Marist way and teachers who have been employing the Marist pedagogies in their teaching.

Nowadays, this spirituality, which is at the heart of Marist schools, is being embraced not only by the

Marist brothers but also by educators who dedicate themselves to the teaching ministry and the new generation of educators who had been inspired by the Marist way and made it their own. As the education system has continued to evolve with the modernization, there is a challenge of keeping the Marist spirituality alive in the different dimensions of teaching. While keeping up with the trend, teachers are therefore encouraged to deliver the teaching-learning process in the context of the Marist.

However, in carrying out these teaching practices, most of the time teachers are unaware that they are actually following a pedagogical approach that is based on these Marist principles, an approach that is unique in many aspects that teachers are practicing unconsciously. Considerably, someone can deliver the expected results more if there is awareness and understanding of their activities. As many were already told about the engagement of students, lay partners, teachers and other workers in the Marist spirituality, only few had been revealed about its pedagogical dimension. This leads the researcher to explore the lived-experiences of the teachers in the Marist schools. This Descriptive Study on teaching in the Marist schools aimed to explore the lived-experiences of the Marist educators in the context of their teaching mission that was uniquely Marist. This study also intended to lead to the understanding of the

context of the distinct Marist Pedagogy.

Research Question

This study aimed to describe the lived experiences of Marist Basic Education Teachers in order to understand the phenomenon of teaching in the Marist schools. Specifically, this study answered the question, how do you describe teaching in the Marist schools?

Literature Review

Marist Education

The Marist Brothers of the Schools (FMS), commonly known as the Marist Brothers, is a congregation of men who devoted their lives to Christian education throughout the world, running Catholic schools or otherwise for the training and guidance of youth. The congregation was founded in France in 1817 by Saint Marcellin Champagnat, who realized the values of Catholic Education in schools wherein God, the Blessed Virgin, Catholic Doctrine, and morality are part of the daily program.

The unique form of Marist education is rooted in the spirituality and teaching methods of Marcellin Champagnat, founder of the Congregation of the Marist Brothers...Marcellin's approach to education was rooted in his spirituality. His love for Jesus and Mary was the source of his teaching methods. He distanced himself, for example, from the contemporary approval of corporal punishment, very common at the time. Pedagogical theorizing...he did not do much of this. His contribution was a view of life and of people based on his religious convictions, a profound common sense and a way of coming up with practical solutions to the various situations that he faced (Sammons, 1999). The document *In the Footsteps of Marcellin* had described the significant points about Marist education at these present times. As contributed in part by Marist Brothers and Lay Partners from all over the world, this document clearly synthesized the spirituality, traditions and principles of the Marists in the context of education.

Teaching Practices in the Marist Schools

The distinct practices in the Marist schools were clearly described in the document *In the Footsteps of Marcellin* as based on the shared experiences of the Marist Brothers and Lay Mission Partners all over the world. Although practices may vary from different places, these statements are the mutual agreements among the Marists. Article 38 of the

document states that, as sharers in Marist mission, we are invited to commit ourselves freely and generously to the same charism as consecrated religious or as single or married people, whatever our situation or culture. 13 We identify with the charism in ways that are different but complementary. Together we witness to a unity of story, spirituality, mutual trust and common endeavor. In the Article 39 of the same document, those of us who are Laypeople bring our own individual qualities as well as the fruits of our personal commitment, our professionalism, and our experience of family and social life. As Christians, we witness through our personal lives to the possibility of finding in Jesus Christ the ultimate meaning of life, and of living by His Gospel.

The Marist Charism

In this study, it is also important to look into the concept of charism as this concept would also help in the understanding and appreciation of the Marist way of life. In the study of Green (1997), he was able to identify some indicators of an authentically Marist charism. These are the indicators that are taken from Green in his study on the charismatic culture of the Marist Secondary schools. The core values of family spirit, presence and simplicity can be highlighted, along with the significant place given to Marcellin Champagnat and the Marist story within the cultural expressions of the schools. The maternal style of pastoral care is also a reflection of an authentically Marist charism, as is the priority given to the evangelizing mission of the school.

Marist Pedagogy

Among Marist schools, teachers observe a pedagogical practice that is inspired by the teachings of its founder, St. Marcellin Champagnat. Lay partners who are working in a Marist institution share in the mission that is, "to educate children properly, we must love them, and love them all equally." Green (2006), as cited by Magallanes (2015), presents that Marist Pedagogy refers to the approach of teaching based on the foundational beliefs culled from the charism of St. Marcellin Champagnat. Reflecting on the tradition of the Brothers, Bro. Michael Green, FMS identified the following characteristics of the Marist pedagogy: Presence and Good Example; Ease of Relationship between Students and Teacher; Preference for simplicity; New and More Effective Methods of learning/ Teaching; Importance of the craft of Teaching; Belief in the Young; and Active Awareness

of the Presence of God (Green, 2006).

Methodology

This research used Descriptive Qualitative approach in the conduct of the study. The research questions focused on the experiences of the teachers in the Marist schools with the pedagogical approach in their teaching functions. The study was conducted among the Marist schools within Region XII that offered basic education. The participants were faculty members who had been teaching in the institution for a reasonable period of time. An Interview Guide question which was devised by the researcher based on the objectives of this study was used to gather data from the participants. Further, the data was gathered through an in-depth interview.

The collected data were transcribed every after an interview was done. From the coded data, the researcher analyzed the transcription and formulated relevant themes that supported the discussion of the phenomenon. Then it was compared with the other data until the researcher met the saturation level needed. This saturation was met after the data from the seventh participant was transcribed and analyzed. In analyzing the data and clustering the themes, the researcher used Stevick-Collaizi-Keen Method.

Results and Discussion

In exploring the experiences of teachers in the Marist schools, there were three recurring themes that emerged which described the Marist Pedagogy. These themes explained that teaching in the Marist schools is towards transcendental learning, it is a pastoral responsibility and a shared mission.

Teaching is towards transcendental learning

According to Centeno (2007) transcendental learning goes beyond the confines of the knowing subject. As it were, by a transcendental method, the knowing subject is brought beyond and towards the horizon of being. Such is carried over in the teachers' understanding that their teaching should inspire their students to do more in life than just what were taught in the schools. They were encouraged to follow the Marist values, spiritualities and teachings in their way of living. Thus, teaching in the Marist schools was not limited on what transpired inside the school rather it went farther beyond it.

The Marist document "In the Footsteps of Marcellin"

(Article 35) defined the term transcendent as a way to give the best of oneself to provide the young people with the means of achieving their full potential in life, including their growing faith and their responsible participation in the society. The understanding of the teachers in the Marist schools about Marist way of teaching was also centered in this idea that their functions were beyond the rigid educational setup of producing learned individuals. They clearly recognized that they had a responsibility towards the holistic development of the students with focus on their spiritual growth and awareness of their identity as Marists and the way they lived up to this in their respective communities.

As they shared their understanding about the Marist way of teaching, the participants had always emphasized Marcellin's principle about educating the children through loving them equally as supported by the Marist values that are being integrated in the teaching practices. It was this spirituality that guided the teachers in their service. Although, it took a great depth of understanding and acceptance for them to be able to relate this to the students, the teachers were able to also live up to this Marist values by believing in the capacity of the young for a holistic formation. In response, students and graduates of Marist institutes also established a distinct Marist identity that are reflective of the values that were taught to them.

Teaching is a pastoral responsibility

As teachers embraced their responsibilities as Marist educators, they also assume various functions that are beyond the call of teaching duties and recognized that they had a pastoral responsibility over the children that were entrusted under their care. This is not only because Marists are catholic institutions, but they also focused on the general welfare of the students. Consequently, the way the teachers live up the Marist values were carried over in their teaching practices and the way they relate to students in favor of the latter's holistic formation.

According to Cross, D. and Lester, L. (2014), pastoral care is a policy and practice that is fully integrated throughout the teaching, learning and structural organization of a school to effectively meet the personal, social (wellbeing) and academic needs of students and staff. With its focus on the holistic formation of the learners, education in the Marist schools addressed the varying needs of students across many areas and disciplines. In their teaching practices, teachers in the Marist schools put the welfare of the students as its main priority especially in instruction. In the document Gathered Around the Same Table,

Article 143 discussed pastoral responsibility on a level where Lay Marists are “seeking to be with young people in their circumstances as an impelling means to create new ways of education and evangelization. In response to this, teachers made sure that students were provided with meaningful experiences by adapting to the demands of times and applying new and innovative ways of learning. Although teaching and learning had been a dynamic process, they are firm with regards to the reinforcement of values since this was an important part of the over-all welfare of the students.

The teachers in the Marist schools were fully aware of their pastoral duty even long before. In fact, in the Article 135 of the document *In the Footsteps of Marcellin*, it was discussed that “In all of our schools we establish structures of pastoral care and guidance programs. Through these, we come to know our students better, provide individual attention to each of them, and promote their personal development and social skills.” In doing so, the teachers’ approach to teaching was always in a loving manner as they value their work in service of other people especially the young. Teachers always made ways to establish a connection with their students and also to provide an accommodating and approachable relationship by showing compassion in the way they deal with the students.

Teaching is a shared mission

In his study about the partnership between the Marist Lays and Brothers, Frialess (2019) discussed that collaboration appeared to be very important to be established in the Marist community. This has been practically the reason why most of the Marist schools were giving so much emphasis on building good relationship between and among the brothers and the lay and even with other stakeholders because it has been the foundation of establishing strong partnership.

Throughout their sharing, the participants clearly recognized the importance of collaborative responsibility in achieving the mission of the Marist institution. In fact, they had emphasized that the value of family spirit is present among the teachers and other stakeholders of the schools. They had also recognized that teaching is more effective if there was good partnership with the parents of their students. More so, the connection that they had established with their students even beyond their teaching duties were evident of their efforts to nurture their passion in teaching and sustain their functions towards the mission. As further discussed by Frialess (2019), working collaboratively towards the shared mission

would also mean ownership. The teachers believe that the sense of family spirit that they had experienced in the Marist schools allowed them to share ownership with their colleagues and superiors have also given them a feeling of contentment which in turn motivated them to value presence and commitment in their work.

For teachers who had been in the Marist schools for some time, working together towards the mission was carried over through their social and professional responsibilities. As these teachers immerse in their duty, they also involved themselves in activities that will support in the mission. The document *Gathered Around the Same Table* also cited that Marists find themselves in a variety of pastoral roles working with other committed people, giving a face to compassion, and hands and voice to promote justice.

Conclusion

The result of the exploration showed that one of the dominant emergent themes about teaching in the Marist schools is towards transcendental learning. The teachers understanding on teaching in the Marist schools is that it has to be instrumental to be able to help the learners transform into becoming desirable Marists. As they imbibed the Marist spirituality, the students live up to it and practice the values and principles that they had acquired from the Marist institute. With the proper guidance and motivation from their teachers, the children transcend these learned characteristics into their own undertakings in school and the community.

The way teachers lived up to the Marist principle of educating the young by means of loving them equally inspired these educators to provide holistic experience to the students with emphasis on their pastoral formation. The teaching practices in the Marist schools which were inspired by the Marist spirituality and charism allowed the Marist educators to establish a good relationship with the students making the teaching-learning process a meaningful experience among the students.

Together with the other stakeholders, teachers in the Marist schools work collaboratively towards the shared mission of educating the young in the ways of the Marists. There is common understanding among the teachers, school administrators, Marist brothers and even the parents on their collective responsibility for the holistic growth of the students. The strong family spirit that is present among the Marists had been an important factor in involving the teachers

towards the institute's missions and aspirations. As they journey together and take ownership of their being Marists, they carry along the responsibility of growing this Marist spirituality among themselves and their students.

This study is perhaps an affirmation of the distinct good practices that teachers in the Marist schools had experienced. There is a need to nurture these practices in order for the teachers to completely embrace their distinctive identity as Marist educators. Since it can also be challenging at times, it is important to intensify the level of awareness and the sense of belongingness of these teachers so they can fully immerse themselves in the mission of the institute.

This study which aimed to explore teaching in the Marist schools described the lived experiences of the teachers in the Marist Basic Education institutions. As revealed through the emergent themes, the results of this study implied that: (1) Teaching practices in the Marist schools are focused on the co-responsibility for the holistic formation of the children as they are being developed to become active part of the church and the community. In order to sustain this, teachers must be afforded with opportunities for more pastoral exposure and spiritual growth to nurture the Marist spirituality and charism. (2) Teachers in the Marist schools have a recognized awareness of the distinct practices on the Marist ways of teachings. Thus, the Faculty Development Programs should be designed in support to these practices to ensure that this aspect of the Marist pedagogy is intensified. (3) As teaching in the Marist schools is a shared mission, the partnership and involvement of the teachers with other stakeholders (parents, administrators, Marist Brothers, community leaders, alumni) has to be strengthened so that the Marist spirituality and charism will be experienced in different aspects of the student life.

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