

Who is my neighbour? – 2nd edition 2016/17

Educational Activities in the Marist Education Network Linked with People who Experience Disadvantage

1. The origins of this study:

The Marist order committed itself to its founders' intention of ensuring that the poor and disadvantaged were served by its institutions in a conscious way, reflecting the Catholic Marist ethos in their education ministry. Education systems have developed greatly since the founding of the Society of Mary, but the original founding intention of providing support for the disadvantaged still has a place in the modern context. The European provincial chapter (2009) articulated six strategic directives and one of these was on education. These directives are the chapter's articulation of what Marists are called to be and to do in the European cultures of today. The province has something to offer in the following fields:

- A. Education promoting evangelical values and those of the Marist tradition
- B. Solidarity with people who experience disadvantage, exclusion and marginalisation
- C. Parishes which are more missionary
- D. Enabling people to find meaning in life
- E. Marist Community life
- F. Collaboration with lay people



In its statement on Education the chapter declares that:

- The ministry of education in the province is to be guided by certain **principles**, two of which are:
 - i) Promoting *evangelical values* and *Marist tradition* in education and
 - ii) Researching and supporting initiatives in non-formal education among deprived youth
- And that:
- iii) One of the four **strategies** is to *link efforts in formal education and non-formal education*.

2. The work on **implementing this strategy** has gone through several steps:

- **Working definition of non-formal education - Education Committee:** The province set up an education committee in 2010 and this committee studied the meaning of non-formal education. Discussion of the directive at various regional assemblies became frustrated as there was no shared understanding about the meaning of the term. The committee addressed the question and the education promoter researched the term. While recognising that it has limitations, a working definition was adopted in June 2011.

Non-formal education: Activities *“designed to offer a person the means to enter into an educative process, not part of the **academic** programme, and not necessarily acknowledged by a diploma”*.

Committee for solidarity with people who experience exclusion and marginalisation: Another strategic directive of the chapter was to support social justice ministry (directed towards people who experience socio-economic disadvantage). It undertook a study of individual Marists involved in this ministry (February 2011). In analysing the responses, it became clear that there was an absence of information about how the institutions of the province (education and parishes) contribute to this ministry.

- **Education institutions and activities in support of disadvantaged people:** Linked with the concern expressed at the Provincial Chapter (2009) and a desire to discover how schools and other Marist organisations address commitment to this core value, it was decided to conduct a survey of the schools and other educational institutions to establish what was already being done. The two committees undertook a joint study of the educational initiatives (February 2012) to (a) identify and (b) catalogue activities undertaken by them in association with those who experience disadvantage. Six categories of activities (cf. No 7, p.3) were offered in a grid, one of which was non-formal education. Responses were gathered and analysed in June 2012. A report was produced and presented both to the European Education Network Forum in Passau in November 2012 and to the Provincial Chapter in January 2013. In June 2016, the Education Committee decided to update the report in preparation for the Provincial Chapter 2017 and the second meeting of the Heads of the European Marist educational institutions. Responses were gathered between September and November 2016. An analysis of these responses is the substance of this report.

3. Summary points from the study:

- The survey identifies the commitment of educational establishments and their communities to maintain this aspect of the Marist core values and tradition in their life and work.
- The survey catalogues 141 activities (136 in 2012) in 15 educational establishments (14 in 2012), rich in variety, creative and with the involvement of the whole community.
- 12 of the 15 locations explicitly undertake non-formal education activities.
- Activities in the non-formal education category subdivide into 4 classifications:
 1. Curriculum based programmes
 2. Charitable activity
 3. Educational support (including overseas)
 4. Integration activity
- Educational establishments are rooted in their local context. They act in solidarity with those who experience disadvantage in their environment and within their own community.
- Overseas solidarity is undertaken less often than expected considering links with communities and projects abroad often through Marist contact.
- More use could perhaps be made within the education community of the formation potential of exploring solidarity issues through links with projects, i.e. awareness-raising.
- Collaboration is a value. A notable feature is the number of organisations involved in the activities. In 2016 there are 82 activities involving other organisations (72 in 2012).

4. Links between Marist vision and values, with education: The founders of the Marist order placed the highest priority on ministry to the most deprived and marginalised people in society and this included providing access to education. From the earliest times that commitment was at the heart

of each Marist school and community and its work. The success of Marist schools worldwide speaks for itself. Marist education is valued and sought after in Marist schools throughout the world. The excellence achieved by the schools has brought them to the forefront of education and, as a result, the schools have attracted students from well-to-do homes where a high standard of education is valued and prioritised. This is to be celebrated and accepted as a compliment to the work of the schools and the standards of education achieved from the humblest of beginnings. That success has brought Marist education into mainstream systems and, consequently, very few Marist schools, especially in Europe, are perceived to be schools for the poor and deprived (cf. Appendix p.9).

5. The results from the 2012 and 2016 surveys provide an overview of the range and nature of the work being done by teachers, students, parents and others through a wide variety of direct charitable works and educational interventions in the educational centres, their wider communities and in the developing world. This narrative, based upon the survey results, is an effort to highlight and celebrate the valuable work being done by the schools.
6. **The emerging picture of the formal education system and people who experience disadvantage:** Like many similar exercises, the survey does not provide us with all of the richness of the work of the various projects, but there is sufficient description to indicate the commitment of the schools and their communities to maintain this aspect of the Marist core values and traditions in the life and work of the educational centres. Sometimes the links with non-formal education were clear and relevant and sometimes they were tenuous, but the commitment to serve the poor and disadvantaged was always at the heart of every project.
7. **Template of Categories of Activities – an activity can be classified in more than one category:**
 1. **Non-formal education:** activities “designed to offer a person the means to enter into an educative process, not part of the academic program, and not necessarily acknowledged by a diploma”.
 2. **Awareness-raising:** activities to increase consciousness of the issues of solidarity and development locally or overseas
 3. **Educational within the curriculum:** exploration of ethical and moral issues
 4. **Overseas Solidarity:** linked to development projects abroad including personnel or financial support of development initiatives
 5. **Local Solidarity:** activities aimed at the implantation of solidarity with disadvantaged people at locally
 6. **Direct charitable activity:** benevolent activities including raising money for charities

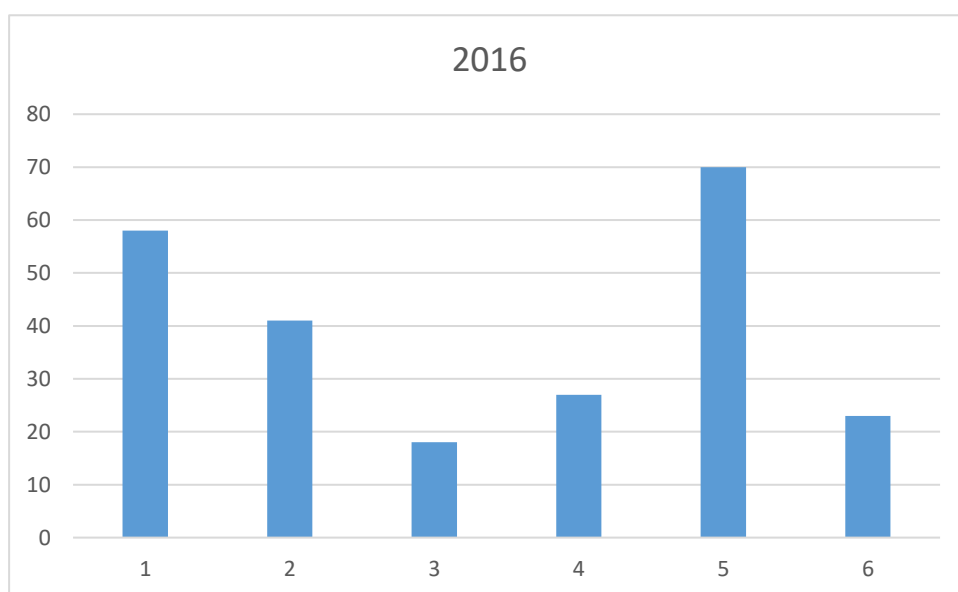
8. The number of times a category is mentioned in relation to total activities:

It is important to remember that any given activity may be registered in more than one category.

1	2	3	4	5	6
58	41	18	27	70	23
41%	29%	13%	19%	50%	16%

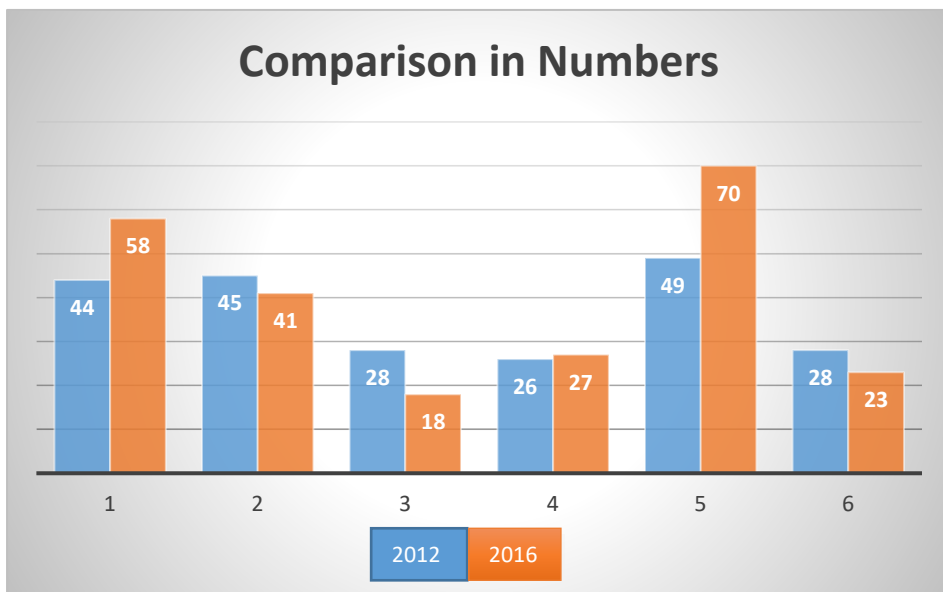
Total number of activities: 141

There were 141 different activities mentioned and almost all of these activities were registered in multiple categories. The percentage figure in the table above for each activity is calculated as follows: $141 = 100\%$ so 58 is 41% of that total number of activities etc.



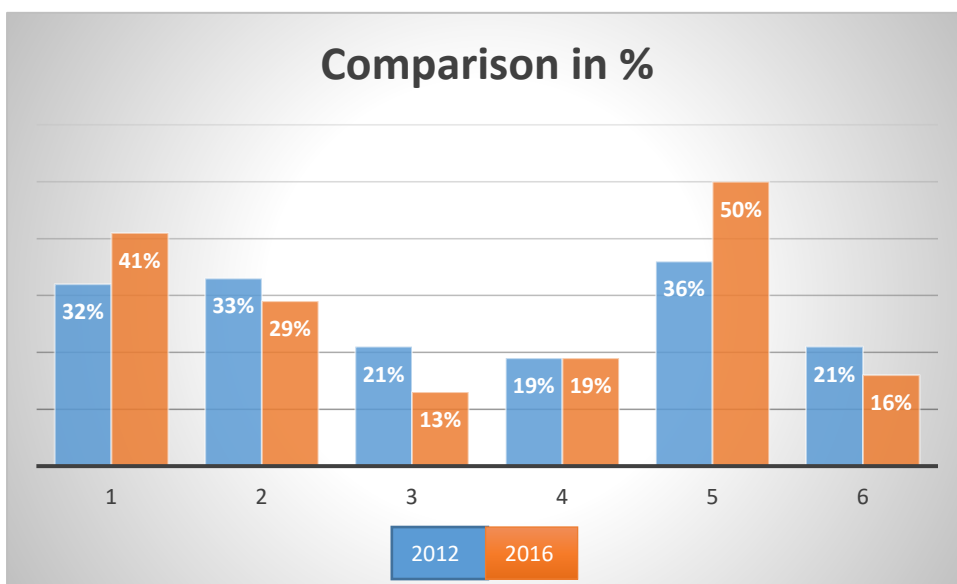
It can be seen from these results that the educational centres are very much focused on their local context – they act in solidarity with those who experience disadvantage in their environment (category 5 local solidarity) and also with those in their school community (category 1 non-formal education). Indeed, it is interesting to note that it is these two areas that have seen a significant increase in activity since the 2012 survey. Considering that category 5 is the highest category, it is a little surprising that category 6 (direct charitable activity) is at the lower end of frequency and, indeed, appears to have declined since 2012.





Category 4 (overseas solidarity) remains in line with the 2012 result and is less than might be expected, given that some of the education centres have forged strong links with communities and projects abroad (often through contact with Marist communities). These links are

frequently creative, but the variety of activities appears to be restricted. There is not a high correlation between overseas solidarity and category 2 (awareness-raising activity), which suggests that in some cases more use could be made of the formation potential of exploring solidarity issues through links with these projects.

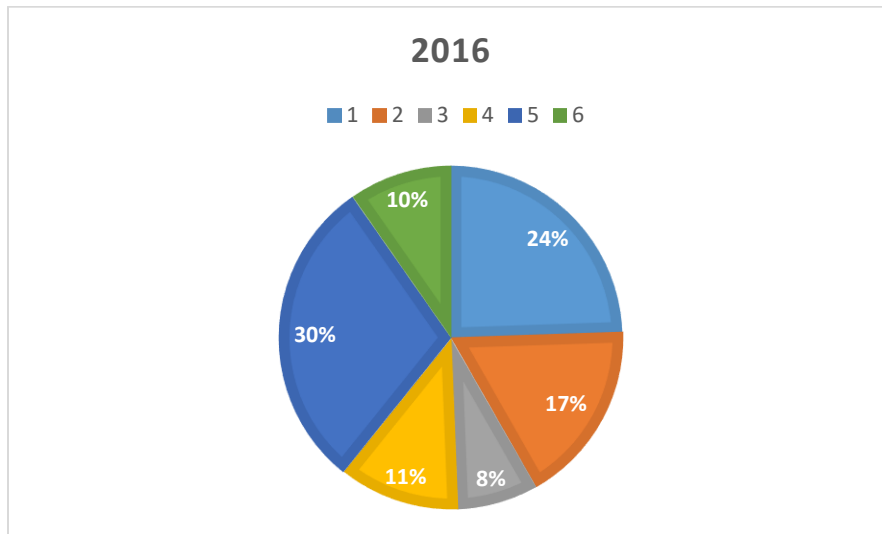


Category 3 (educational activities within the curriculum) appears to have declined significantly since 2012. This is highly unlikely to be the case. We conclude that this is merely an anomaly that is best explained by inconsistent

interpretation of this category across the centres. If the survey is repeated in the future, it will be necessary to ensure that there is a common understanding of what is to be included in this category.

The number of activities in category 2 (awareness-raising) remains similar to that reported in 2012.

9. Categories as a % of the total number of marks in the returns:

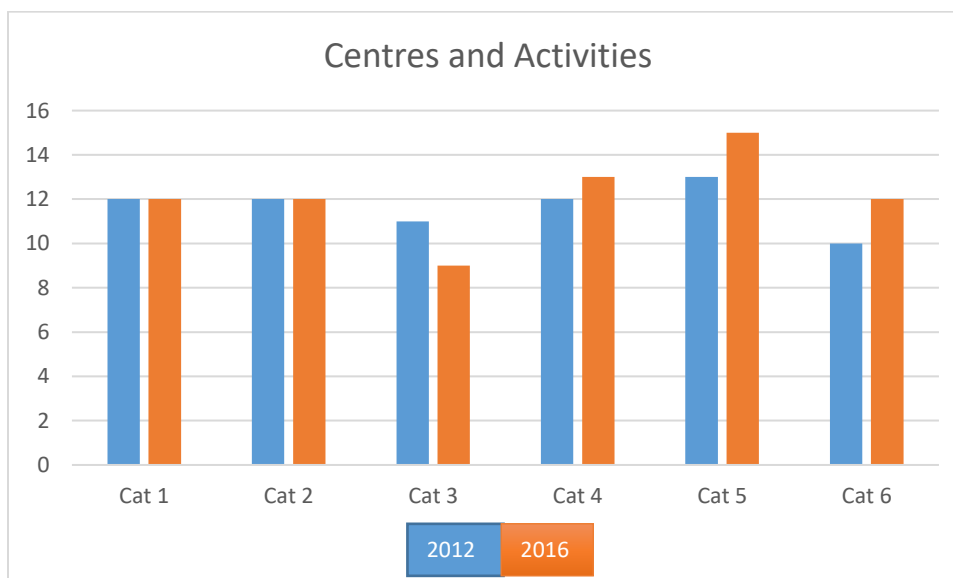


This way of calculating the returns is the total number of times a category is identified in relation to the total number of marks in the returns. The total = 237 (220 in 2012). An activity can, of course, be marked in more than one category. 237 = 100% so 58 is 24% of the total number of marks etc.

Categories 1 (non-formal education), 2 (awareness-raising) and 5 (local solidarity) collectively constitute 71% of the total marks. This would appear to confirm that the educational centres focus internally on their own disadvantaged students and on their local context.

The apparent anomaly of the low ranking of category 3 (educational activity within the curriculum: exploration of ethical and moral issues) has been addressed above. Since category 5 (local solidarity) is the highest percentage (30%), it might be expected that category 6 (direct charitable activity) would be strong but it is at the other end of the scale (10% in comparison with 13% in 2012).

10. The educational centres and the number of activities in the categories:



The total number of educational centres which replied to the survey was 15 (14 in 2012). This chart indicates how many of them have activities across the categories. All fifteen centres are engaged in category 5 (local

solidarity), and 13 are engaged in category 4 (overseas solidarity). The number involved in category 1 (non-formal education) and category 2 (awareness-raising) remains 12, as in 2012. The anomaly associated with category 3 (educational activity within the curriculum: exploration of ethical and

moral issues) reappears here with the same caveat as above. The number of centres involved in category 6 (direct charitable activity) has increased from 10 in 2012 to 12 in 2016.

11. The categories and their frequency:

	Wk		Month		Occ		Total	
	2012	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016
Cat 1	24	35	4	9	16	14	44	58
Cat 2	10	12	4	6	31	23	45	41
Cat 3	13	11	4	4	11	3	28	18
Cat 4	4	6	4	4	18	17	26	27
Cat 5	22	38	6	8	21	23	49	69
Cat 6	7	4	2	3	19	15	28	22

There has been a significant increase since 2012 in the weekly activities in categories 1 (non-formal education) and 5 (local solidarity). There is not great variation across the categories for monthly activities, and the number of monthly activities in each category is relatively low. A significant number of the activities are occasional, i.e. in association with a season (Christmas, Lent etc.), in response to a particular event, or to a special opportunity that presents itself.

12. Educational centres in relation to each category:

This study is not a comparative one. Rather it offers a picture of the approach adopted by the different educational centres to work on behalf of and with those who experience disadvantage. It is evident that the context of an establishment and the interests of staff and personnel influence greatly the choice of activities undertaken. One type of activity is strong in one location and another in a different one. Each site develops its activity in accordance with its strengths – and in some cases this is because of links with Marists or the presence of Marists (lay and/or clerical) at various levels in the school community.

13. Who is involved, and in how many activities:

In 2012 there was a total of 136 activities. In 2016 the total was 141. The following table shows who was involved in how many of the activities.

	2012	2016
Students	120	132
Staff	128	126
Parents	53	53
Org	72	82

The most striking feature of this table is the high number of activities (82 in 2016 in comparison with 72 in 2012) that actively involve other organisations. Collaboration with other agencies both (a) gives access to disadvantaged people at home and overseas and (b) increases resources made available to

the educational centres. The active involvement of parents in more than 37% of the activities is testimony to the positive relationships with parents established in the centres.



14. Final observations:

If we see the value of solidarity with those who experience disadvantage, then it makes sense to continue to engage in it in a conscious way.

Some questions to identify possible further steps:

- a) In our educational establishment, why do we do these things – what is our motivation? Does it relate to the “core values”?
- b) What do we see as the benefits of the activities? Are there particular benefits that are worth pursuing?
- c) Are there ways in which we could make more of our involvement in the activities to raise awareness of the issues involved?
- d) What is the link between formal and non-formal education in our educational centres and could these links be further developed?
- e) Do we want to collaborate with others in these activities and, if so, how could this happen?

Possible future directions:

The commitment of Marist schools to serve the needs and requirements of the marginalised in society is impressive. It is not necessary to comment on or to evaluate the various activities that are alive and well in the schools, but it is to be hoped that centres will be willing to share their particularly innovative ideas with the other Marist centres through the sharing of good practice on the blog of the European Marist Education Network.

It is not unreasonable to assume that some of the activities have a deep and meaningful presence in the lives of the educational centres and their communities, whilst others remain on the fringe. However, these activities would not take place if there were not people prepared to carry on the traditions. Very often these people occupy significant positions in the schools and bring the status of rank to the projects and schemes.

The process of gathering this information has been a valuable one to the European province, which is anxious to continue to promote its founder's intention to be attentive to those who experience disadvantage. It corresponds to its desire to disseminate these creative ideas amongst the centres and other partners. As usual, when such an exercise of data-collection is completed, the next question emerges; what do we do with the information and to what purpose?

- a) Communication of the information is essential. The educational centres will inevitably take heart from so much good news and the affirmation of those who participate in this work. Recognition is bound to be a positive influence in their professional commitment to work that brings no material rewards.
- b) The Marist European province articulated six directives at its Chapter 2009. The directives are interconnected and need to be repeated and explained in the different contexts within which they are expected to be implemented. This means that we need to include them in bold letters in communication with the educational centres.
- c) The link between ministry for disadvantaged people and Marist core values is very strong. Some of the educational centres may well be simply continuing a tradition that existed long before the current participants became involved. It would not serve anyone's interest to demand that centres link this work with Marist core values or school ethos but it may be helpful to encourage leadership teams to make the connection explicit in their work for social justice, where that is not already the case.
- d) One possible approach might be to ask centres to articulate in the simplest terms and explain to their own community why they do such things. There is little doubt that some centres are already doing this and, if so, they have much to contribute as examples to those who do not. Again, using the blog of the European Marist Education Network as a means of disseminating good practice could be of benefit here.
- e) A consequence of the recommendation in the previous point is to ask the centres what benefits [educational and others] they perceive as an outcome of participation in non-formal efforts to help people in their own community and beyond. In doing so, we may well open a rich vein of valuable experiences and philosophy that underpins the work in the centres.
- f) Practical ways of promoting non-formal activities should also be explored. It is possible in some countries to gain recognition through including this work in curricular structures. As the curriculum develops, there is a case to be made for recognition of personal development programmes that are mediated through projects and activities that can be linked with the curriculum and also to the core values of Marist education.
- g) It would be appropriate to encourage all Marist educational centres to develop collaborative links on projects that help the disadvantaged with partner centres within the network. Initially, there may be few collaborative links but this is a time when we can make efforts to provide further

opportunities for schools to share their experiences and aspirations. The “common project” 2016/17, the objective of which is to support a specific project in Brescia, may prove to be an important starting point in this regard. Participation in common projects would enable the European Marist Education Network to become more than the sum of its parts.

Non-formal education is becoming more difficult in a world where education and the structures around its delivery are increasingly bound by regulatory frameworks. That is not to say that it is impossible. It does mean, however, that those who wish to promote it need to be more imaginative and innovative in order to benefit the most disadvantaged who often do not have the desire or the capacity to participate in formal education. The research we carried out indicates that Marist schools have identified areas of need and taken steps to bring some support to those people who experience disadvantage. The range of activities in a variety of settings is impressive and it is important for this work to be recognised. Unfortunately, the need is not diminishing and, if anything, is increasing and spreading into different environments. This presents a challenge to Marist educational centres and their communities. It is a challenge the province and the centres are well-equipped to meet as they draw upon their Marist heritage.

Martin McAnaney and Donald Lillistone
November 28th 2016

Appendix Note:

Education has become more structured since the early nineteenth century and throughout western society state school systems have developed in a way that has replicated the work of the earlier Catholic schools. This is a most welcome development and free education is now available in most democracies. That does not always imply that the needs of all students are met and drop-out rates and non-participation rates suggest that there are still a number of disadvantaged students whose educational needs are not being met by the education systems that are accessible to them.

Other factors such as immigration, unemployment and social problems associated with disadvantage have increased the numbers of young people who come into the category of disadvantaged and are unable to take advantage of the benefits of the education systems available to them. In many instances, the problems that these people experienced in their own countries have been imported with them and exacerbated by other difficulties associated with culture and language. Non-formal education has been identified as a means whereby people can be prepared to benefit from education in the formal setting of schools and organisations that work within the schemes and structures of Government Education Departments and Ministries. Students who have the skills and educational experiences to benefit from the opportunities that such institutions can offer can achieve really well and it is a cause of pride and satisfaction that so many of our schools are perceived to be successful in helping students to achieve their educational targets and aspirations.

