

INTERVIEW WITH IGNASI GRAU I CALLIZO, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF OIDEL



Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

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EXCERPTS:

- “There are two major challenges for Catholic education in its dialogue with governments. First, although Catholic schools are one of the major actors in the field of education, they are struggling to be considered as such. They need to show why they matter to participate in the design of solutions.”
- “A second problem is that Catholic schools, like many other education groups, are struggling to define their objectives and targets in a rapidly changing world. Secularization and a growing polarization are causing a new struggle. The Global Compact on Education could [help] think about this challenge.”

You are the Director General of OIDEL. Could you please explain your current responsibilities and how you are engaged in Catholic education?

OIDEL is an international NGO specialized in the freedom of education. We advocate for a holistic realization of the right to education. We have an agreement with the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC in French) under which we represent Catholic education with United Nations agencies in Geneva. In this regard, we have been representing the interests of Catholic education at the United Nations as well as the interests of the members of OIDEL. We have been taking the floor on behalf of OIEC on different topics such as education as a cultural right, education and minorities, the situation of Palestinian Christian schools, the situation of Catholic Schools in Central Africa Republic, and concerns about the closure of faith-based schools in Sweden.

What do you believe are the current strengths of Catholic education and in particular the strengths of the activities you are involved in?

A first important strength is that Catholic schools are the largest non-state network of schools in the world. There are Catholic schools in all continents, and they are welcoming children from all backgrounds.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Ignasi Grau I Callizo, the Director General of OIDEL (*Organisation Internationale pour le Droit à l'Éducation et la Liberté d'Enseignement* in French) explains the work of OIDEL and its collaboration with OIEC on Catholic schools, as well as his hopes for the Global Compact on Education proposed by Pope Francis.

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Another strength of Catholic education is its history. There have been Catholic schools at least since the 16th century. This long history enables Catholic schools to consider the diversity of challenges we face for the right to education with a certain historical perspective.

In which areas could Catholic education be improved and how, especially again with regards to the activities that you are personally engaged in?

I think there are two major challenges for Catholic education in its dialogue with governments. First, although Catholic schools are one of the major actors in the field of education, they are struggling to be considered as such. Catholic schools and universities need to show why they matter so they can participate in the design of common solutions.

A second problem is that Catholic schools, like many other education groups, are struggling to define their objectives and targets in a rapidly changing world. For many Catholic schools, secularization and a growing polarization between different groups are causing a new struggle. The Global Compact on Education that Pope Francis has called for could be a good instrument to enable Catholic education to think about this challenge.

How do you understand the call from Pope Francis for a new Global Compact on Catholic education? How do you think you and your organization could contribute to the Pope's vision?

We consider the idea of the Global Compact as very important. In all the events and actions we lead on behalf of OIEC, we get inspiration from the Pope's call. We aim to put different people with different perspectives together, so that we can think together about how to solve the problems confronted today by education systems and find consensus on approaches to do so.

What events, projects, or activities could be suggested to strengthen a common identity for Catholic education at a global level? What are your ideas?

The International Congress organized by OIEC for Catholic schools a few years ago at Fordham University and the next congress that will take place in December 2022 in Marseilles are good examples of what can be done to promote exchanges and mutual learning. Catholic education has to bear in mind its universality. In this regard, initiatives that enable to see the different actors and the realities of Catholic education in different parts of the world are very useful to grasp the beauty and grandeur of Catholic education.

Initiatives such as the Global Catholic Education website are useful too. Under Education 2030, UNESCO requires civil society to collect information and to evaluate public policies. This platform is an interesting tool in order to collaborate with the main international organizations involved in Catholic education to advance the realization of the right to education. Perhaps the website could be a way to respond to some of the needs of UNESCO.

Could you please share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I completed a Bachelor in Law at University Pompeu Fabra and a Bachelor in Business Administration at UOC University of Barcelona. I started an Internship in OIDEL, and enrolled in a Master's in Political Theory at the University of Geneva. Before I finished my Master's I was hired by OIDEL as a Policy Officer. I was in charge of representing OIDEL with international organizations and developing research. Five years after my arrival to Geneva, the Director General of OIDEL tragically passed away due to a brain tumor. The Executive Committee of OIDEL asked me if I wanted to become the new Director. Since then, over the last three years, I have served as the Director of OIDEL.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I thank God for giving me such a wonderful career so far. I have been passionate about public policies since I was a child, and I have become enthusiastic about educational policies since I finished my bachelor degree. I have been tremendously lucky to be able to meet Ministers of education from all around to world, to know wonderful people making education happen, and to meet with some of the most wonderful minds in this world. I do not know if this is the anecdote you were expecting. But I am truly looking forward to continuing working in this field.