

INTERVIEW WITH SR. KATE PUNNACHET, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT ST. JOSEPH'S CONVENT SCHOOL



Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

August 2021

EXCERPTS:

- “My research has been based on Prof. Grace's writing and his ideas, especially on the concept of ‘service to the poor and the marginalized.’”
- “During my time as his student and his secretary, Prof. Grace always focused and talked about the pillars of Catholic schooling... I have been greatly influenced by the example he sets as a “Catholic” teacher. He is kind, nice, and always ready to help anyone who comes to see him.”

Could you briefly introduce yourself and explain what your work on Catholic education entails?

I am Sr. Kate Punnachet, a sister of Saint Paul of Chartres. I am currently working as assistant principal at St. Joseph's convent school, a Catholic religious private school. Specifically, I am the director of the English programme. There are 1,000 students (of whom 25 are Catholic). I am now trying my best to put my Ph.D. research into practice. I did my research under Prof. Grace's supervision on the topic of servant leadership, and now I am trying to empower all my teachers to have a servanthood attitude in the school. Although in my school, most of the students are Buddhists, I use morals classes to teach them about Catholic values, especially sharing with the marginalized.

How and when did you first meet with Prof. Grace and how did you interact with him over the years?

After I had finished my Master's degree at Liverpool JM University, I looked for a supervisor in the area of Catholic education. I searched Google and the CRDCE webpage popped up. I contacted Prof. Grace, but unfortunately, he told me that he was not able to act as my main supervisor.

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? This interview is with Sr. Kate Punnachet, a sister of Saint Paul of Chartres. The interview is part of a series in honor of Professor Gerald Grace's retirement from St Mary's University.

Visit us at www.GlobalCatholicEducation.org

I applied to IOE and Prof. Peter Earley became my supervisor. However, when I was a Ph.D. candidate at IOE, I went to see Prof. Grace to ask for suggestions on my research. He told me that he could help me! Thank God for that. Since then, he has really helped me at every stage of my research. He has been a really great teacher in my life. After graduation, when I decided to enter the convent, he came to my clothing ceremony. He has also supported my work in the Catholic school.

How do you see Prof. Grace's main contributions to practice or research in Catholic education?

I thank God for giving me the opportunity to work as an administrator for Prof. Grace during my life in London. Prof. Grace works extremely hard and contributes all his energy to Catholic education and research. He really thinks about the future of Catholic schools. He has started to work on a Catholic School Handbook and Journal. These are remarkable.

In what way did Prof. Grace influence your own practice or research in Catholic education?

My research has been based on Prof. Grace's writing and his ideas, especially on the concept of "service to the poor and the marginalized." During my time as his student and his secretary, he always focused and talked about the pillars of Catholic schooling, especially exclusion and inclusion. More importantly, I have been greatly influenced by the example he sets as a "Catholic" teacher. He is kind, nice, and always ready to help anyone who comes to see him. I have never seen him refuse to help someone.

How can Catholic education scholars make sure that their research is useful to practitioners?

It is obvious that there is a large gap between educational research and implementation. Perhaps, professional

learning communities could be useful for the researcher to get some pre-research data before formulating a research proposal. Also, we should encourage more practitioner researchers.

What are for you the most critical areas of future research in Catholic education, and why is that?

During the era of Pope Francis, it could be said that there were many encyclicals, talks, conferences and synods on Catholic education. More recently, the Pope asked all Catholic educators to help finding research and solutions for a Global compact on education. So, the most critical areas of future research should focus more on Catholic values, pedagogy, and Catholic fraternity in the school.

What is your advice for graduate students who may be interested in conducting research in Catholic education?

Firstly, the theological dimension of the Catholic school should be underlining all research frameworks. It should be realized that Catholic education is based on Christ's teaching which is found in the Bible and the Church's teaching. There is the crucial need for separation between any business / industrial model research and Catholic educational research.

Is there a personal anecdote of your interactions with Prof. Grace that you would like to share?

Prof. Grace has a great sense of humor. He is very kind and always helpful. When I finished my Ph.D., I brought another sister to meet him and asked him to help her. He said, 'Well, OK'. He guided her and she became one of his administrators. When she finished, I brought yet another doctoral sister to him and asked for his help once again. He said 'Yes, sure', and he helped us all. All three of us really appreciate and love him so much. He has truly given his life to research on Catholic education.