

# Global Perspectives on the Role of Dialogue in History Education

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Socio-cultural, Psychological, and Digital Dimensions

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## Chapter 9

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**Fostering reflective dialogue on the difficult past and present of religious diversity in Europe**

A docutube methodology

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# 9 Fostering reflective dialogue on the difficult past and present of religious diversity in Europe\*

A docutube methodology

*Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse*

## **Introduction: the problematic representation of religious diversity in past and present in society at large**

Religious diversity is an essential characteristic of the European continent. Throughout the past two millennia, this diversity has played an important role in the ins and outs of societies in Europe and how they developed. The perception of it tends to focus on negative aspects in this regard. Religious diversity was a contributing source of terrible tensions, persecutions, conflicts and wars. Just think of the persecution of Christians in the 1st century CE, the crusades against the Cathars, the discrimination, exile and persecution of Jews and Muslims after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Thirty Years War, the French Revolution, the Holocaust during the Second World War, and terrorist attacks throughout the 2000s. From that negative perception that gradually became dominant in societies in Europe, (religious) homogeneity, especially from the 16th century onward, was increasingly considered the ideal. For example, the Peace of Augsburg promoted the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*: the ruler of a region determined which religion could be practiced there. This ideal meant that religious diversity and minoritized groups that embodied diversity were viewed negatively. With the rise of nation-states in the 19th century, religion was nationalized, so to speak, and religious and ethnic homogeneity were bound together. The aversion to (religious) diversity and the negative perception of minoritized groups were thus perpetuated (for all this, see Pasture and Schellekens, 2022, Pasture 2024a).

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The negative perception of religious diversity remains dominant today. Religious diversity is often portrayed in a bad light, provoking controversy. One only has to take a look at recent newspaper titles with (a) religion in the title to find that mainly negative connotations accompany them. Titles often connect religion and religious diversity with extremism, exclusion, discrimination, intolerance, violence, terror and war. In public debate, religious diversity is mostly presented as problematic. Consider debates in many Western countries around banning or allowing headscarves in public spaces. Successive global opinion polls conducted by Ipsos (2017, 2023) show that nearly half of the almost 20,000 participants confirmed the statement ‘Religion does more harm in the world than good’. At the same time, in both polls, about three-quarters of the participants each time indicated feeling ‘comfortable being around people who have different religious beliefs than me’.

In political discourses, religious diversity is more often than not approached negatively. Certainly on the right side of the political spectrum, this is the case. Consider, for example, a 2018 election poster of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) (at the time of regional elections in Bavaria), on which is written ‘Keep Christian values!’ and ‘Islam does not belong to Bavaria!’ (<https://retopea.eu/s/en/item/5941>). Furthermore, the poster depicts the Bavarian flag, as well as a crucifix, against the backdrop of a beautiful mountain range. This poster carries very explicitly the message that Bavaria was always Christian and should stay that way. Earlier, former Spanish Prime Minister Jose María Aznar stated the following, in a speech at Georgetown University in September 2004 titled ‘Seven Thesis on Today’s Terrorism’, in which he had the intention of explaining the terrorist attacks in Madrid in March 11, 2004:

The problem Spain has with Al Qaeda and Islamic terrorism did not begin with the Iraq Crisis. In fact, it has nothing to do with government decisions. You must go back no less than 1,300 years, to the early 8th century, when a Spain recently invaded by the Moors refused to become just another piece in the Islamic world and began a long battle to recover its identity. This Reconquista process was very long, lasting some 800 years. However, it ended successfully. There are many radical Muslims who continue to recall that defeat, many more than any rational Western mind might suspect. Osama Bin Laden is one of them. His first statement after 11th September – I repeat, the 11th September – did not begin by referring to New York or Iraq. His first words were to lament the loss of Al Andalus – Moorish Medieval Spain – and compare it to the occupation of Jerusalem by the Israelis.

(<https://retopea.eu/s/en/item/1885>)

In 2019, Bart De Wever (2019), leader of Belgium’s largest political party, the Flemish-nationalist N-VA, published a pamphlet *On Identity*, in which he suggested a decline of the West along as a result of too much Muslim presence (with Muslims explicitly considered being the out-group) and thus religious diversity in society. He reinforced his message with a reference to the battle of

Poitiers where ‘Europe’ had not so much won a battle as repelled the ‘Islamic invasion’. In so doing, he completely ignored recent historiographical interpretations of the meaning of the battle of Poitiers. Nor did he raise the concern that an Islamic victory might have had positive effects, as American historian David Levering Lewis (2008) argued. In an albeit very stereotypically dualistic and polemical style, he suggested that if the European continent had not been deprived for so long of the fruits of the cultural and scientific flowering in the Arab world, it would have been able to start much earlier with, for example, insights into astronomy and trigonometry, and it would not have been stuck in perpetual intolerance and war for so long.

It is striking in the aforementioned examples how the past is used and misused for current political purposes, and how a negative perception of religious diversity in the present is co-constructed on the basis of specific historical representations. These are rooted in a very negatively colored dominant collective memory about religious diversity, which is perpetuated as a result of such discourses. As is often the case, this collective memory has very little nuance and is therefore far removed from historical reality. First of all, it is also true that throughout Europe’s past, there was often peaceful religious coexistence, for example in Norman Sicily (11th–12th century), in Hungary (13th century), and in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795) (Pasture, 2024a). Religious diversity, moreover, sometimes brought prosperity, as during the Moorish rule of parts of the Iberian Peninsula, al-Andalus (711–1492). Furthermore, religion and religious diversity are more often used as an excuse for conflict and war, rather than being effectively the source of it. This does not mean that religious diversity is never actually the source of conflict, but even in such cases, additional motives of a geostrategic, political and financial-economic nature apply in addition just as much. Third, too often the unifying and healing power of religion is lost sight of (Cavanaugh, 2009). Religious forces, as much as hatred and division, can also create opportunities for peaceful coexistence and bring stories and messages of hope. Thus, it is clear that there is room for a more nuanced understanding.

This contribution examines this in more detail, with a focus on young people and their (historical) perception of and dealings with religious diversity in Europe. In the first place, the question is asked whether the observations made above about the perception of religious diversity in society at large also apply to young people. What representations are they confronted with and what historical representations of religious diversity do they hold? Previous research, within the European Commission’s REDCO project (‘Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries’ between 2006 and 2009), showed that among young people in Europe, there are large differences in the perception of religion and religious diversity (Arweck, 2016; Jackson and McKenna, 2016). Some can relish religious heterogeneity, others just barely. Second, the question arises – building on the insights around the perceptions prevalent among young people – how a nuanced view of religious diversity can be sharpened and how young people’s thinking about and attitudes toward religious diversity and

peaceful religious coexistence can be challenged and enriched. To this end, a specific methodology is proposed.

To answer the first question, we rely on the research findings of the ‘Religious Toleration and Peace’ (Retopea) project conducted by a multidisciplinary consortium of nine academic institutions and two NGO’s from eight European countries (Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, North Macedonia, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom) (Altnurme et al., 2022). The historical representations that young people from the aforementioned countries are confronted with in secondary school history textbooks and television series were analyzed. Knowledge, opinions and perceptions of young people in Europe were also analyzed. As far as the specific methodology for sharpening a nuanced view of religious diversity is concerned, a number of constituents are formulated below. These are fostering historical knowledge and historical thinking about religious diversity, critical thinking, and constructive dialogue on complex, sensitive and controversial issues. After all, learning always takes place in the social sphere. For each of the constituents, a structured literature study was conducted, after which a concrete didactic strategy was designed in which each of those constituents was given a place: the so-called docutube methodology.

### **Young people and (historical representations of) religious diversity**

Young people of course come into contact with the past of religious diversity via history education. In order to get a view of the perceptions that are passed along here, history textbooks for each of the six years of secondary education from eight European countries analyzed: Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the UK (Van Nieuwenhuysse et al., 2022). The focus of the analysis was on six specific interreligious contacts from the past two millennia.<sup>1</sup> A first important result concerns the fact that interreligious contacts are never approached purely from a religious perspective. They are always embedded in a broader political, cultural and socioeconomic context, which implies that explanations for developments throughout the past are never attributed solely to religion and religious diversity. In the description of interreligious contacts, agency – which provides an answer to who or what played a role in certain events and developments in the past (Seixas, 2012) – is mainly attributed to powerful individuals (religious, political, military and intellectual leaders), groups (mostly elites such as the bourgeoisie or knight’s orders, although sometimes also ‘ordinary’ groups here such as peasants, merchants and poor townsmen are mentioned) and non-human agents (such as the state, the church, Islam and Christianity). ‘Ordinary’ individuals and women remain almost completely out of the picture. The agents that are mentioned are described not only in religious terms but also in national, socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural terms. At the same time, the representation is strikingly homogenizing. Very often reference is made to ‘the Christians’, ‘the Muslims’ and ‘the Protestants’, without regard for the diversity and differences manifested within these groups. The language used by textbook authors in their accounts on

religious diversity is neutral – except when recent extremist, terrorist violence by religious fanatics is addressed: this behavior is severely condemned. The framing of interfaith contacts seems less neutral. They are systematically portrayed very negatively, as provoking conflict and war and being violent. Only exceptionally are positive elements (such as toleration and cultural flourishing) mentioned. A final striking observation is that textbooks hardly make connections, or draw analogies, between past and present in their accounts on interreligious contacts and religious diversity. The accounts are mainly past-oriented.

Another representation of religious diversity faced by young people emerges from audiovisual products (Ketola et al., 2022). An analysis of two fictional (*Prespav* and *Koreni*, resp. produced in North Macedonia and in Serbia) and one documentary (*On the Same Side*, produced in North Macedonia) series and of the sitcom *Citizen Khan* (produced in Britain) shows that these especially pass on a positive representation of message about religious diversity. Social media, in particular selected YouTube channels, show a more divergent picture: they can foster positive as well as negative stances and do not always offer (or encourage to take) nuanced perspectives. As these channels have an enormous influence on young people, it seems necessary that young people are empowered and equipped with tools enabling them to critically deal with them.

What images do young people themselves have of religious diversity? How do they perceive religious diversity in the past and in contemporary society? What is the knowledge they have on religious diversity in the past and to which extent is their perception of it in the present based upon this historical knowledge? How do they evaluate representations of religion and religious diversity (in the past and present) in the media? From focus group interviews with 132 students, aged between 13 and 18 years old, from 12 (religious and non-religious) schools in eight countries (the UK [England], Belgium [Flanders], Germany, Finland, Estonia, Poland, North Macedonia and Spain) could be deduced that they largely considered religious diversity in a positive way (Maiden et al., 2022). They nevertheless emphasized that all citizens, regardless of their religious convictions, should accept a set of common values and that religious extremism should not be tolerated. In terms of historical knowledge, it was striking to observe that the participants only held a narrow range of historical knowledge. They could, for instance, only name few major events or turning points related to religious diversity in the past. On a conceptual level, they often confused religious and ethno-cultural diversity and did not differentiate between both. The participants also built biased, one-sided and simplistic representations of religion and religious diversity in the past. At the same time, the participants were well capable of deconstructing present-day representations of current religious diversity. They almost all testified to a good and critical understanding of the negative framing of news media in portraying religion and showed themselves able to deconstruct the bias, generalization and even stereotypes present in media representations of religious diversity.

The focus group interviews brought another important finding to the fore. They made it clear that the participants were longing to attribute meaning to – and were constructing an opinion about – religious diversity. They expressed

the need to be taught more about religious diversity in the past and the desire to discuss the issue of religious diversity. Throughout the focus groups, they also showed themselves capable of doing so in a very respectful, sensitive and constructive manner.

### **Handles for (in)formal dialogical history education on religious diversity in the past**

How to engage with this readiness of young people around promoting a knowledge-rich, nuanced and informed view of and attitude toward religious diversity in the past and present? Three major handles seem very important here: promoting historical-critical thinking, creating dialogue, and appealing to young people's creative capacity (also in the function of motivation).

#### *Fostering historical-critical thinking*

Reflecting on religious diversity in the past and the present and adopting an attitude toward it cannot be done on the basis of smoke and mirrors. This requires thorough knowledge of it and a critical look at (often very biased) representations of religious diversity circulating in popular historical culture. It is important to work with young people on both. Immediately, this brings us to the notion of historical thinking (Wilke et al., 2022). In the first instance, historical thinking is about knowledge of the past (knowing history): understanding the past in its own logic and context, considering multiple perspectives. Historical thinking is also about knowledge of history (doing history). How does knowledge of the past come about? What is the value of historical representations about religious diversity, and how can we assess them? This is where critical source analysis comes in: in what context was a historical representation created? Who were the creator and the target audience? What effects was the maker aiming for? On what did he base his representation? How did his or her position influence the view of religious diversity? This brings us to the complex relationship between past and present. Historical representations about religious diversity always emerge in present that shapes the representation. As demonstrated above already with, for example, the AfD election poster or Jose María Aznar's speech in 2004, the past is often instrumentalized, used and abused to current ends. A specific selection of events often takes place, in order to form specific collective memories and create a certain sentiment regarding, in this case, religious diversity.

Related to this is often the idea of 'learning *from* the past': the study of the past that allows lessons to be drawn from the past. Those lessons may be: we should avoid religious diversity as much as possible, because it only leads to conflict, violence and war anyhow; but equally, an opposite lesson is that we should embrace religious diversity because it provides cultural enrichment. These opposite lessons alone show that the idea of 'learning from the past' is not self-evident. On the contrary, it is actually highly problematic. Learning

from the past is something that in principle cannot be done, as the past never repeats itself. Therefore, the past never offers a ready-made recipe book for the present and for the future. Historical contexts differ too much for that: the experience of religious diversity in societies today is not the same as that of, say, 500 years ago, because both the societies (including manners and legal framework) are different, as is the place of religion in them. Moreover, human behavior is contingent: it does not simply follow fixed patterns. In practice, furthermore, learning from the past often leads to little critical dealing with the past. This approach starts from a fixed outcome (the lesson young people need to learn, e.g., embrace religious diversity uncritically, or just exclude it) that then strongly guides historical representation, including the selection of historical events and interpretations (Van Nieuwenhuysse and Wils, 2012). What we can do, to a certain extent, is learn *with* the past (Maiden et al., 2024). This implies that the past can serve as a source of inspiration, showing that challenges can be dealt with in different ways that different answers can be given. The past shows many and various ways of dealing with religious diversity and resolving tensions in that regard. Precisely in this sense, it provides material for reflection (what were intended and unintended consequences of certain actions in dealing with challenges for instance) and inspiration about forming one's own opinion about how to deal with challenges today.

The idea of learning with the past encourages engaging with specific aspects of dealing with religious diversity in the past, from which equally specific inspiration can be drawn. For example, regarding strategies related to peaceful religious coexistence, or the critical dealing with stereotyping of the religious 'other'. Similarly, one can zoom in on the notion of agency. Who were the main characters in a historical development or event related to religious diversity? Who had the ability to generate change? Who co-determined the course of the past? (Seixas, 2012) As indicated above, agency is mostly attributed to powerful individuals and groups or non-human agents. However, we know that 'ordinary' people and groups also play an important role and can co-determine the course of events. Although a certain measure could be imposed from above, it was always the ordinary people and ordinary people who (did not) implement it. A focus on agency hence fosters reflection on the agency of common individual and groups, in the past and in the present.

This immediately contributes to the action competence of young people. Research (see, e.g., Sass, 2022) shows that if we want young people to engage and take responsibility in society, a number of conditions must be met. Among other things, they must have knowledge of concrete possibilities for action and have the confidence that, as individuals or as a group, they can actually change something in society. A focused study of the past can contribute to this. Again, such a study does not provide ready-made recipes for action in the present and the future but offers inspiration and shows that taking action, also from below, can indeed make a difference.

*Fostering constructive dialogue on sensitive issues connected to religious diversity*

The construction of a knowledge-rich, nuanced and informed view of and attitude toward religious diversity in the past and present never occurs in a vacuum. Quite the contrary, this construction takes place in a very concrete societal context, in which religious diversity is sensitive. This is not only because the topic is surrounded by intense societal debate but also because it touches on young people's own perceptions of their identity, as well as experiences in their own living environment, within the social groups in which they move. Religious diversity fully meets what is understood in the literature to be 'sensitive topics': these are topics (1) where interests, values and views diverge and may be in conflict; (2) that might be associated with strong social divisions; and (3) that are important to individuals, with which they can identify and with and have experience of (Hess, 2004). It is important that young people learn to deal with such sensitive issues in a constructive manner. This is where the idea of dialogue comes in, co-inspired by socio-constructivist insights (Cobb, 1996), which state that learning does not take place in a social vacuum and thus cannot be separated from the social context (Vygotsky, 1978). If we want young people to acquire a nuanced opinion and attitude on sensitive issues, this means engaging in dialogue with others, learning to listen to different views and, from there, reflecting toward the development of their own informed point of view.

What then should such a dialogue look like? A good dialogue about religious diversity in the past and in the present is closely connected to historical-critical thinking. A good dialogue is based primarily on sound knowledge and understanding. When historical facts and interpretations are brought in, on the basis of which an argument is built, it is important that they be plausible. As cited above, historical thinking is not done on the basis of smoke and mirrors. In addition, a good dialogue is characterized by active participation, reflection and co-creation and not by an authoritarian transfer of insights (Scott et al., 2006). Therefore again, it is important to focus on learning with the past, rather than from the past (the outcome of which is often already determined by who is steering the learning). Participants should be encouraged to actively contribute to the dialogue. This attitude can be encouraged by creating a safe, open climate in which dialogue can take place, and by giving them a sense of purpose, envisioning a specific outcome, which requires a collaborative effort, and joint reflection. Third, it is important to create a willingness to listen in dialogue so that multiple perspectives can be addressed, heard, and weighed (Itzchakov et al., 2024). Those multiple perspectives can be brought in through the participants but equally through materials provided. Many methods can be used to provoke a good dialogue. The choice depends on the extent to which young people are expected to learn to involve different perspectives or to engage in dialogue mainly from their own views, and on the extent to which an open and safe climate exists in which young people can share their highly personal opinions. In a structured academic controversy, a question for

deliberation is provided for which students (must) take a pro or con position and seek information to substantiate their position (Avery, Levy and Simmons, 2014). Here, there is the opportunity to assign students a position to defend, even if they disagree. At the same time, this gives them the security of not having to express their own beliefs right away and not having to immediately take a pronounced position themselves. In a Socratic dialogue, led by an educator, young people search together for a possible answer to a philosophical question, for example whether living together in religious diversity is possible, each from their own point of view. A dilemma discussion starts from an issue that involves a moral dilemma, a situation in which all alternatives encounter serious objections: for example, the question of whether or not very stereotypical representations of the religious ‘other’ (Jews, Muslims, etc.) should be shown in history textbooks, or in museum displays. On the one hand, showing this event may contribute to a better understanding of the complex and sometimes violent history of religious interactions and critically arm viewers against such representations. On the other hand, there is a risk that the use of such representations contributes to existing prejudices and fuels tensions between different religious communities. Participants then search for arguments for and against each alternative and the values behind the arguments for it. They then formulate a considered and reasoned choice for one of the alternatives.

*Addressing the creative capacity of young people: digital story-telling*

Above it was already mentioned that research among young people showed that they are eager to gain more insight into religious diversity in the past and are also keen to discuss the issue of religious diversity. To keep this initial motivation among young people high, it is important to take into account insights from Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory. In addition to the importance of connectedness, including through dialogue, these researchers also point out that young people need to experience a degree of autonomy and thus need to be able to make their own choices instead of having decisions imposed on them. It is also important to connect with young people’s competence. Soon, then, their digital competence comes into the picture. They are often very adept at all kinds of digital applications from their presence on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and other social media. These channels really appeal to them, in part because of the digital stories they tell. Young people like to tell them themselves. Working on this, in other words inviting young people to develop digital stories in a collaborative and dialogical effort, immediately combines the aforementioned connectedness and autonomy and further sharpens the digital competence of young people. After all, just because young people are constantly moving in a digital world, it does not mean that they can fully comprehend it critically. For example, young people often ‘look’ without ‘seeing’ (Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2016). They do not necessarily dwell – although in the sample interviewed from various European countries described above, this turned out to be very good – on the extent to which both still and

moving images, in films and documentaries, for example, but just as much in vlogs, are reliable, on the purpose they pursue, on the message they want to convey, for example about religious diversity (which can be both positive and negative). We live in a visual culture, but young people therefore do not yet critically comprehend the parameters of that visual culture, something that is nevertheless necessary to make them critically digitally literate (Wegerif, 2013).

### **Docutube methodology as a means for dialogical history education on religious diversity in the past**

From the above handles, a search was conducted for a specific methodology that would encapsulate the three handles – in other words, that would promote students’ historical-critical thinking to sharpen a nuanced view of religious diversity, that would prompt them to engage in reflective dialogue in order to challenge and enrich their thinking about and attitudes toward religious diversity and peaceful religious coexistence, and that would allow them to tell digital stories about religious diversity. This quest resulted in a so-called docutube methodology. This consists of a number of closely linked components, divided into four phases, which together manage to fulfill the aforementioned ambitions (Wolffe et al., 2023). They take about three full days consecutively, but they can just as easily be spread out (over several weeks).

#### *Exploratory phase*

A first phase, the exploratory phase, aims to explore the topic of religious diversity and to deepen young people’s knowledge. In a group of young people, an educator asks questions about the representations of religious diversity that young people encounter in popular culture today, about how they assess the degree of religious diversity in the past in the region they inhabit today, about how they stand in relation to religious diversity today, and about how religiously diverse their environment is and what (positive or negative) experiences they have had regarding religious diversity. At the start of this dialogue, group members establish their own rules of conversation. This strengthens their sense of autonomy and involvement. The educator, who moderates the dialogue and ensures that everyone can have a say, monitors the application of the rules. Through the dialogue, young people’s prior knowledge is activated, they articulate their initial views, and preconceptions also surface.

In a second step in this phase, young people are encouraged and supported in deepening both their knowledge and reflection on religious diversity past and present. To this end, they are provided with about four to five ‘clippings’. These are short historical or topical source fragments from broader historical sources, such as historical peace treaties and charters, often established after long periods of conflict, violence and war (see van Nieuwenhuyse et al., 2024). Those peace treaties prioritize specific dealings with religious diversity to prevent new conflict and violence: for example, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) in

which the formula of *cuius regio, eius religio* (the principle that the ruler could determine the religion of his territory) was nuanced in the sense that religious minorities in their daily lives were allowed to continue their religious celebrations privately (Jürgens, 2024). Another treaty, the Royal Charter of Rhode Island (1663), stated that only the government was competent for civil affairs, hence separating church and state, and introduced the idea of freedom of religion (Pasture, 2024b). Clippings promote not only the knowledge of the past among young people but also their knowledge of history. Indeed, other sources from which clippings were drawn are political speeches, museum displays, historical films, paintings, election posters, YouTube videos, etc., in which specific representations of religious diversity are imparted. Young people are invited to critically analyze these, in order to deconstruct the mechanisms of instrumentalization of the past in current social and political discourses. Each clipping is provided with the necessary historical context, which helps young people to better understand the source itself, thus deepening their knowledge of religious diversity. In addition, the clippings are accompanied by some questions that can initiate reflection among young people. For example, the question is asked how young people feel about dealing with the remembrance of interreligious violence. Today, remembrance is considered essential to reconciliation. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), however, went for the opposite: it required to officially forget about the atrocities and crimes that had happened during the war.

A total of some 400 visual, textual and audiovisual clippings are available, arranged by theme,<sup>2</sup> but also searchable by time, space and peace treaty (for the complete collection, see <https://retopea.eu/s/en/page/clippings>). Young people can thus choose their own approach according to their interests, which reinforces their sense of autonomy; equally, an educator can make a selection (also based on prior knowledge, intellectual capacities, etc.). In small groups (from three to five), young people work with the clippings. From an understanding of the content of and a critical view of the clippings, and thus an expanded historical thinking about religious diversity, they begin to learn with the past. Indeed, they are not given answers, only questions to the clippings. They reflect in dialogue on the representation of religious diversity, on dealing with religious diversity in arriving at peaceful coexistence, on the role that ordinary individuals and groups play in this and from there also on attitudes they wish to adopt (if any).

### *Planning phase and creation phase*

Equipped with more historical-critical understanding and a substantiated opinion on matters of religious diversity, in a second phase, the creative capacity of young people is appealed to. They are, in fact, invited to turn their ideas and opinions, related to the clippings they analyzed, into a so-called docutube with their group of three to five people. Docutubes are short documentary-style videos, of about three minutes length, created by young people, in which they critically engage with the notions of religious toleration and peace in the

past and present (Van Nieuwenhuysse et al., 2024). Before developing their own docutube, young people are first introduced to audiovisual (film) grammar (Wolffe et al., 2023). Through watching clips of popular vloggers, they learn how vlogs are structured, consider what makes a vlog a good vlog, and analyze what makes a single shot a good shot. Then, they will work creatively and autonomously to write their own scenario for their own docutube. They do this by first dialoguing together about the central message (with arguments for it) they want to bring. In case they do not reach a consensus, they may as well present a dilemma. Then, they work out a storyline with an introduction, middle and end, in which the clippings have their place and in which past and present are connected in a nuanced and substantiated way. The groups of young people then present that storyline to each other. In a half-minute pitch, they explain their message and plan, after which a dialogue about it takes place in the large group. After this, each small group finalizes its storyline and translates it into a scenario in which the story is divided into sequences (shots). Here, the young people have an eye for who, what and where they will film, in what style, and what sound will be associated with the filming.

Once everything is planned, the third, creation phase enters (Wolffe et al., 2023). Young people then actually start filming. They collaboratively execute their screenplay and record all planned shots. Then, the editing process takes off. Here they put the shots in the right order and insert captions, music and other audio. Again, they do this in full autonomy, which supports their motivation.

### *Reflection phase*

In the fourth and final stage, young people reflect on the process undertaken (Wolffe et al., 2023). Here, the three aforementioned handles come together. Young people begin by looking at each other's docutubes, seeing each other's creativity and digital story-telling competency. Based on this, a new dialogue takes place, guided by an educator: how do other groups of young people deal with the issue of religious diversity in the past and in the present? What message do they want to share? And why? How to account for their views and opinions, from their positionality and previous experiences? How do they assess each other's arguments? Here historical-critical thinking returns to the foreground. The dialogue is broadened to religious diversity in the past and in the present, linking back to the initial starting conversation. What views and attitudes did young people hold there regarding religious diversity? How did they deal with the historical knowledge they gained through the analysis of the clippings? To what extent did this enrich their historical-critical thinking? What did they learn with it? What did they take away from it? How do they now view religious diversity? And how do they see their position and role in society in this context? In so doing, their action competence is sharpened.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

From the fact that insight, reflection and dialogue about religious diversity in the past and in the present need deepening among young people and that young people themselves are interested in this, ways were sought to meet this need. A number of handles were identified as the constituents of a methodology to work with young people: promoting historical-critical thinking so that they can learn with (not from) the past, fostering constructive dialogue on religious diversity being a sensitive issue and appealing to the creative ability of young people, in particular their skills of digital story-telling. This led to the establishment of a docutube methodology whereby young people, after enriching their historical-critical thinking on religious diversity, put their views into a vlog of a few minutes, through a dialogic and collaborative process, and afterwards also dialogue about it together in a reflective manner.

This methodology was pilot tested in practice, in both formal educational contexts (school) and in non-formal educational contexts (museum and youth work), in eight different European countries: Belgium (Flanders/Brussels), Germany, Estonia, Finland, North Macedonia, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom. Although a systematic effect analysis via an experimental set-up with intervention and pre-posttest measurement is as yet missing, an evaluation of the pilots among both young people and accompanying educators shows that the docutube methodology is well received and seems to achieve its goals (Van Nieuwenhuysse and Salmesvuori, 2023). Young people indicated that they were motivated by the methodology – among other things, making a short film captured their enthusiasm. They also appreciated the way they arrived at more historical thinking and deeper understanding and reflection through clippings. They strongly appreciated the collaborative, dialogic and creative process through the four phases, during which they experienced autonomy and connectedness. Educators confirmed these findings. Throughout the various pilot tests, even though their group was religiously diverse, it did not occur that young people found no consensus on a central message they wished to convey. Nevertheless, should this occur, it need not be an insurmountable problem. Through a dilemma-based approach, they can still engage.

Finally, this docutube methodology need not be limited to the topic of religious diversity. In fact, the methodology is transferable to other sensitive histories as well and, in formal educational settings, can be applied outside a school subject such as history. Likewise, it can be used cross-curricular (with a range of subjects: language subjects, cultural studies subjects, citizenship subjects, etc.) and can be implemented independent of specific lessons.

## **Notes**

- 1 The interreligious contacts being between: (1) Christians and Roman polytheistic believers during the Roman Empire (1st–5th century CE); (2) Jews and Christians in Medieval Europe (6th–15th century CE); (3) Muslims and other religions during the Middle Ages (7th–15th century CE); (4) Catholics and Protestants in the

Early Modern Period (16th–18th century CE); (5) those in favor of secularism and those who wanted religion to have a strong position within society (18th–19th century CE); (6) Muslims and other (non-)religious groups in the present, since 1989 (post-Cold War era).

- 2 The themes are gender and sexuality; migration, trade and travel; propaganda, stereotyping and communication; discrimination and otherness; ideas about tolerance; peace and conflict management; memory and heritage; law, police, and public order; places and buildings; religious practice; clothing; family life.

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