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Young Educators' Voices on Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Diversity in Leisure Time Education: Towards an Effective Policy Framework and Training

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Abstract: This paper examines a study that aimed to fill in the gap in research about interfaith dialogue and leisure time education in Catalonia (Spain). Combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods, we analyzed the role that interfaith dialogue plays for leisure time educators. The research was carried out between 2021 and 2022 in three phases: one descriptive through an ad hoc questionnaire, a second one comprehensive by exploring educators' voices in focus groups, and a third one prescriptive to design evidence-based policy recommendations and training frames. The whole research allowed us to state the low status that interfaith dialogue plays within the leisure time education in the research context, as well as the high expectations and positive attitude by educators to improve interfaith dialogue in these educational settings. Further research considering more voices (children, families, administration, religious groups) could be explored in the future to increase the knowledge on the subject.

Keywords: religious diversity; interfaith dialogue; leisure time education; interculturality; non-formal education

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1. Introduction

Our research focus is on interfaith dialogue and leisure time education. Interfaith dialogue is increasingly recognized by governments across Europe as fundamental to the development of cohesive communities (Orton 2016). A dialogue that is framed within a broader perspective of intercultural dialogue, which has received special attention in our social context in the last two decades. An intercultural dialogue understood as a process that takes place between people with different backgrounds, which is guided by willingness, respect, and openness; it is a dialogue between equals.

The role of non-formal education to promote intercultural dialogue consists in creating spaces and conditions for this to happen. It enables individuals in identifying and overcoming their stereotypes and prejudices, by being open and motivated to cooperate in order to build up a better, fairer, and more inclusive society. Intercultural dialogue allows people with different perspectives and views of the world to work and live together (Lafraya 2011).

We can find references on non-formal education and intercultural dialogue in the contributions of the Council of Europe in this regard (op.cit.). However, when we land on the interfaith dimension of this dialogue, the references are practically non-existent. Nevertheless, more contributions can be found when the focus is on interfaith dialogue and education in general. An analysis of the recent international literature reveals three areas of interest: theoretical framework, contexts of application, and methodologies. Regarding the theoretical framework, two main topics emerge as relevant. On the one hand, we find papers that substantiate the ethical need for an education on interfaith issues, with a strong emphasis on social justice (Halsall and Roebben 2006; Ibrahim et al. 2012; Chapman et al. 2014; Farrell 2014; Orton 2016; Edwards 2018). On the other hand, we remark

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numerous contributions in the field of interfaith dialogue from education between religious communities in conflict, with a special focus on conflicts between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities (Abu-Nimer 2001, 2004; Alizai 2017; Hadi Kusuma and Susilo 2020).

Regarding the research contexts on interfaith dialogue and education, we mostly find references related to formal education: general curriculum development (Sultana 2022), primary education (Ipgrave 2013; Fancourt 2016), secondary education (McCowan 2017; Mąkosa et al. 2022), and a larger number of contributions to university and higher education in general (Daddow et al. 2019; Khambali et al. 2019; Meri 2021). Non-formal education receives little attention, with few exceptions. For instance, a qualitative contribution on adult education that analyzes a group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adults located in the southeastern United States (Pope 2019), or the analysis of the role of young people in interfaith dialogue in Greater Manila (Cornelio and Salera 2012). With regards to informal education, we should highlight some analysis on parenting and the role of families in the education of religiosity and interfaith dialogue (Pusztai and Fényes 2022; Aantjes 2022). References to leisure time education in both non-formal and informal education are non-existent.

Finally, concerning the methodological approach, papers are about the predominant methods and materials that are used in education when dealing with interfaith dialogue, and the key success factors associated with them. We would highlight articles on the use of narratives by teachers and students to develop forms of discourse and community that are intellectually, ethically, and affectively powerful (Khambali et al. 2019; Splitter 2020); European experiences to introduce interreligious dialogue to young people from a philosophical approach (Helskog 2015); methodological proposals for curriculum assessment on the topic (Maudarbux 2016); or the use of museums about religions as a powerful educational resource to promote reflexivity and attitudinal change (Re'em 2001).

At a national scale, academic contributions to the relationship between interfaith dialogue and education in our Catalan and Mediterranean context is not something new, since we can find references from a few decades ago (Mitri 1997; Pérez-Soba Díez del Corral 2003). We found papers on the analysis of strategies to transform Catholic religion classes at school into spaces of openness and interfaith dialogue, with an emphasis on intercultural mediation as a privileged tool for interfaith encounters with people of diverse backgrounds (García López and Martínez Usarralde 2016), or an essay conducted in Italy to analyze the teaching of the Catholic religion at school and how it should be adapted to today's religious pluralism (Buselli-Mondin 2020). It is also remarkable an analysis of the Catholic religion class as a learning space for the expression of freedom of conscience and the right to an individual judgment (Guerrero Díaz 2020).

We would like to highlight the research aimed at detecting the needs for interfaith dialogue in Catalonia expressed by academic experts, public administration, and professionals. All of them agree that an attitudinal change is necessary and that this change should come from training and adopt a transversal and permanent form, from school to higher education, and continuous training as well (Freixa-Niella et al. 2019).

Spanish researchers have produced literature in two dimensions. A first one is focused on interfaith dialogue in the school context by covering several dimensions (legal, political, ethical, comparative, didactic) (Alvarez-Castillo and Essomba 2012). A second one is focused on interfaith dialogue in the field of intervention with young people, from a perspective of preventing religious radicalization (Vilà Baños et al. 2018), promoting coexistence between unaccompanied immigrant minors and other native young people through interfaith dialogue (Vilà Baños et al. 2020), or boosting community development (Campdepadrós-Cullell et al. 2021), with a clear aim of providing mutual understanding, gaining knowledge of one's own and the others' religion and beliefs, reducing prejudice and conflict, and improving social coexistence.

However, the gap on interfaith dialogue and non-formal education looks the same than at an international scale. We cannot find any study or research that addresses interfaith dialogue in the context of leisure time education. However, we acknowledge the added

value of two studies that provide us with a methodological frame of reference for our purposes. One was run in 2015, aimed at analyzing how civic associations linked to religious diversity in Catalonia see their own reality. They also report the projects and actions they develop to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue as well as work with schools (Puig et al. 2018). A second one was a survey aimed at finding out the attitude of future educators towards religious diversity, interfaith dialogue, and the role of education in fostering dialogue. This survey was administered to a sample of 574 students from faculties of education of public universities (Rubio-Hurtado 2017). Both investigations indirectly provide key elements and materials for our research purpose.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Goals and Design

As we already stated in the introduction, there is no research literature on interfaith dialogue and leisure time education in the Spanish context in general, and in Catalonia in particular. In order to fill in this gap, the Government of Catalonia released a public call to promote the research in this field, and the ERDISC Research Group of the Autonomous University of Barcelona applied with a proposal that aimed to reach the following goals:

- To know the degree of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity of educators in leisure time education in Catalonia.
- To understand the factors that consolidate or become a barrier for interfaith dialogue in leisure time education.
- To design a public policy proposal to promote interfaith dialogue in leisure time education from a critical thinking and citizenship approach.
- To design a curriculum framework for the training of educators in leisure time education.

A successful achievement of these research goals required a process based in the phases so that each phase could fulfill a specific dimension of the whole investigation. Therefore, every phase was designed within a logic research framework where the obtained data in one phase was the starting point of the following one. The three phases of the research were as follows:

1. Phase 1 (Descriptive). This phase aimed to make a first introduction to the state of the matter, based on a quantitative data collection in two dimensions: what leisure time educators think, and what they do. In order to collect data on what they think, we planned to apply a test adapted to the Catalan reality. We wished to measure the degree of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity of leisure time educators.
2. Phase 2 (Comprehensive). The descriptive phase was supposed to highlight gaps and challenges to be analyzed. Therefore, we designed and implemented discussion groups with leisure time educators. These discussion groups were organized according to three variables: confessionality (catholic/laic), territoriality (metropolitan Barcelona/countryside), and type or organization (scout/esplai). A special focus on educators' beliefs, expectations, and values was intended.
3. Phase 3 (Prescriptive). The results obtained from the discussion groups had to be the materials to design guidelines for political and pedagogical action based on scientific evidence (evidence-based policy). We wished to design a training framework for leisure time educators, as well as some policy recommendations, to create preconditions for an effective introduction of interfaith dialogue in leisure time education. The Delphi method was considered as the most convenient for that purpose.

2.2. Materials and Methods of Phase 1

The methods for the first phase were based on studies by Sabariego-Puig et al. (2017) and Rubio-Hurtado (2017), who individually approached an interfaith dialogue perspective in non-formal educational organizations and measured the attitude of future educators towards interfaith dialogue. We identified a suitable instrument for our purposes: the IRRSS attitudinal scale (Interreligious and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale) by Holm et al. (2012),

inspired by previous work on DMIS (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) by Bennett (1993) and by Abu-Nimer (2001), more focused on interfaith sensitivity.

The IRRSS consists of a 28 item Likert scale (see Table 1) from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The instrument measures four orientations towards intercultural and interreligious differences: (1) Denial, (2) Defense, (3) Acceptance, and (4) Adaptation.

Table 1. IRRSS scale (Holm et al. 2012).

1. Intercultural Sensitivity Scale
1.1. Intercultural Denial
People of my own culture behave in the only way that makes sense.
When I am travelling I often feel that people are rude to me.
I do not need to care about what happens in other parts of the world.
Travelling abroad makes me feel uncomfortable.
1.2. Intercultural Defense
There are lots of people representing other cultures who are arrogant.
I divide the students of my school into "our people" and "other people".
I hate people who represent certain culture or ethnic group.
When I am travelling, there are many things about the local people that irritate me.
1.3. Intercultural Acceptance
It may cause misunderstandings that people representing different cultures express their feelings in various ways.
Different behaviors make me see things in a new way.
Cultures are different because different things are considered important and valuable.
The more I know about various cultures, the better I recognize the differences between them.
1.4. Intercultural Adaptation
I am able to put myself in the position of a person from another culture.
Many of the immigrants living in our country try their hardest to adjust to our life style, and that is why I also want to understand their way of living.
It is only a good thing that people are different.
I am able to behave in culturally appropriate ways but still adhere to my own values.
2. Interreligious Sensitivity Scale
2.1. Interreligious Denial
I do not need information about other religions.
It is nice to meet with new people as long as they are not members of different religious groups.
I have never had contacts with the people of other faiths because I do not find it important.
2.2. Interreligious Defense
I consider people from other religions as a threat.
God will punish the people from other religions after they are dead.
I think that people of certain religions are so stupid that they could figuratively "blow themselves up" with their stupidity.
2.3. Interreligious Acceptance
It is only a good thing that there are students from different religious groups in the school.
People of different faiths have a right to practice their own religion also in our country.
I learn best about the manners and views of different religions from the believers of those religions.

Table 1. *Cont.*

2.4. Interreligious Adaptation
I can pray with a person of another religion if she or he asks me to.
I could participate in the service of no matter religion with a believer of that religion.
If I lived abroad I could easily see myself practicing the religious manners of that country (such as fasting or wearing religious clothing) and it would not detract my own world view.

The instrument is sub-divided into an Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, consisting of 16 items measuring the 4 orientations, and an Interreligious Sensitivity Scale, of 12 items measuring responses on the 4 orientations.

The scale was translated into the language of the target group of participants (Catalan) by following a back-translation method and with the active participation of 3 academic experts and 3 potential participants. The final instrument was also tested in a pilot with participants in order to ensure an acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.781. The final instrument was administered between February and March 2022 by using the JotForm online platform.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using SAS v9.4 statistical analysis software, and it consisted of a univariate and bivariate descriptive analysis, obtaining a global index of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity, the figures corresponding to each item, and some statistically significant relationships among items and sample variables.

2.3. Materials and Methods Phase 2

For the second phase of the research, we proposed the implementation of discussion groups with an intentional sample that responded to the diversity of voices of leisure time educators. As we mentioned, these groups were designed by considering three variables: confessionality (catholic/laic), territoriality (metropolitan Barcelona/countryside), and type of organization (scout/esplai). We designed a sample of 30 educators distributed in 6 groups of 4–6 members.

The interview's guidelines and questions were extracted from the preliminary results obtained from phase 1 by focusing our attention on those items that scored the highest, the lowest, or with apparent contradiction between two of them. The composition and the final interview template were also supervised by 3 academic experts and 3 potential participants. We analyzed the data through a content analysis based on grounded theory and with the support of ATLAS.ti v7.0 digital software.

2.4. Materials and Methods Phase 3

The data collection methods planned for the third phase was based on the Delphi method. It was initially proposed to set up two groups of experts, one focused on a training dimension, and a second one more focused on a public policy dimension. Each of the two groups of experts was supposed to count on the participation of 16 members, 50% of whom had to be participants during phases 1 and 2. The selection of the other 50% would take into account the degree of academic expertise and social relevance that allow to guarantee high standards of validity and reliability of the outputs.

Twelve experts in a single group finally participated for each Delphi process, and two rounds were enough to reach data saturation and conclusive results. Therefore, a list of policy recommendations came up from this deliberation process, as well as a training curriculum for leisure time educators on interfaith dialogue. Both documents were constructed on an evidence-based process whose background was the preliminary outputs of phase 2.

2.5. Sample: Selection Criteria and Participants

The target group of our research was the young educators of the leisure time education in Catalonia, since they were considered as key informers for our purposes. The study population was made up of 11,562 educators who carry out their educational activities in 745 leisure time education centers (divided into 225 Scouts centers and 520 Esplai centers).

For phase 1, the questionnaire was sent to the whole population since it was a small number of participants, and all of them were available through e-mail and social networks. The sending was authorized and implemented by the leisure time education federations, and the individual consent was included within the questionnaire form. Finally, a total of 539 leisure time educators responded. The caracheristics of the final sample can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample in phase 1.

Age	18–19 years	20–21 years	22–23 years	More than 23 years	
	23%	29.3%	21.7%	26%	
Gender	Female 63%	Male 34%	Non-binary 2%	Other 1%	
Education	Primary 0.4%	Lower secondary 4.8%	Post-compulsory 55.3%	Tertiary education 39.5%	
Main occupation	None 2%	Student tertiary 62%	Student post-com. 6%	Work 30%	
Parents' birth place	Both Catalonia	Both outside Catal.	Only one Catal.		
	73.3%	10.9%	15.8%		
Birth place	Catalonia	Rest of Spain	Rest of EU	Outside EU	
	93%	3%	1%	4%	
Indiv. religious identity	Non-believer	Catholic	Muslim	Orthodox	Other
	74.2%	20.6%	1.3%	0.2%	3.7%
Instit. religious identity	Confessional	Laic			
	62%	38%			
Years of experience	1–2 years	3–4 years	5 or more years	Less than 1 year	
	21%	29.5%	35.4%	14.1%	
Training qualification	None	Only director	Only educator	Both dir. and edu.	
	25.2%	2.2%	51.9%	20.6%	
Location	Metrop. BCN	Countryside			
	67.2%	32.8%			

For the phase 2, 6 discussion groups were made, with leisure time educators who represented the diversity of leisure time federations in Catalonia, in terms of their educational project (scout/esplai), their location (metropolitan Barcelona/countryside), and their religious identity (catholic/laic):

- GD1: Scout (countryside, catholic);
- GD2: Esplai (metropolitan Barcelona, catholic);
- GD3: Esplai (countryside, laic);
- GD4: Scout (metropolitan Barcelona, catholic);
- GD5: Esplai (countryside, catholic);
- GD6: Scout (metropolitan Barcelona, laic).

Finally, for phase 3, a group of 12 experts was invited to participate in a Delphi process for 2 differentiated contents: policy recommendations and training framework. We selected

participants who were experienced both in administration and training related to leisure time education:

- 3 experts with a background in educators' training and management;
- 3 experts with a background in public policy implementation;
- 6 experts with a background in educators' training and public policy implementation.

3. Results

3.1. Results from Phase 1

Results of univariate analysis of the adapted IRRSS scale showed a high interreligious and intercultural sensitivity of leisure time educators in Catalonia, with a global index of 4.18 out of 5. The index was calculated by considering internal consistency and negative correlations that indicated a reversed item were adequately operated. The figures for each item can be found in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of IRRSS items.

	Mean	**St. dv.**
Intercultural Denial		
People of my own culture behave in the only way that makes sense.	3.03	1.179
When I am travelling I often feel that people are rude to me.	1.79	0.899
I do not need to care about what happens in other parts of the world.	1.65	0.963
Travelling abroad makes me feel uncomfortable.	1.59	0.871
Intercultural Defense		
There are lots of people representing other cultures who are arrogant.	2.82	1.269
I divide the students of my school into "our people" and "other people".	1.26	0.644
I hate people who represent a certain culture or ethnic group.	1.17	0.551
When I am travelling, there are many things about the local people that irritate me.	1.52	0.727
Intercultural Acceptance		
It may cause misunderstandings that people representing different cultures express their feelings in various ways.	3.64	1.024
Different behaviors make me see things in a new way.	4.76	0.521
Cultures are different because different things are considered important and valuable.	4.00	0.927
The more I know about various cultures, the better I recognize the differences between them.	3.82	1.011
Intercultural Adaptation		
I am able to put myself in the position of a person from another culture.	3.85	0.923
Many of the immigrants living in our country try their hardest to adjust to our life style, and that is why I also want to understand their way of living.	3.85	1.009
It is only a good thing that people are different.	4.76	0.552
I am able to behave in culturally appropriate ways but still adhere to my own values.	4.30	0.735
Interreligious Denial		
I do not need information about other religions.	1.91	1.097
It is nice to meet with new people as long as they are not members of different religious groups.	1.44	0.981
I have never had contacts with the people of other faiths because I do not find it important.	1.26	0.634

Table 3. *Cont.*

	Mean	St. dv.
Interreligious Defense		
I consider people from other religions as a threat.	1.19	0.589
God will punish the people from other religions after they are dead.	1.09	0.477
I think that people of certain religions are so stupid that they could figuratively "blow themselves up" with their stupidity.	1.38	0.852
Interreligious Acceptance		
It is only a good thing that there are students from different religious groups in the school.	4.56	0.745
People of different faiths have a right to practice their own religion also in our country.	4.80	0.539
I learn best about the manners and views of different religions from the believers of those religions.	4.33	0.863
Interreligious Adaptation		
I can pray with a person of another religion if she or he asks me to.	3.09	1.421
I could participate in the service of no matter religion with a believer of that religion.	3.64	1.218
If I lived abroad I could easily see myself practicing the religious manners of that country (such as fasting or wearing religious clothing) and it would not detract my own world view.	2.64	1.269

The univariate analysis reflects that, on the intercultural sensitivity sub-scale, the items related to denial or defense obtained low values, whereas items considering acceptance and adaptation were higher. The same can be observed when analyzing the interreligious sensitivity sub-scale.

Items such as "I hate people who represent a certain culture or ethnic group" in the intercultural sensitivity sub-scale and "God will punish the people from other religions after they are dead" in the interreligious sub-scale obtained the lowest scores, and we can observe that participants in the sample rejected negative feelings related to hate or punishment when dealing with intercultural and interreligious diversity. On the other hand, items such as "different behaviors make me see things in a new way" or "it is only a good thing that people are different" in the intercultural sensitivity sub-scale, and "people of different faiths have a right to practice their own religion also in our country" in the interreligious sensitivity sub-scale, obtained the highest scores, and this let us see that participants in the sample were clearly positioned in favor of respect and openness towards intercultural and interreligious diversity.

A global analysis on the educators' responses allowed us identify the following outputs:

- Young educators are clearly sensitive to what happens in the world, and do not self-report ethnocentric orientations.
- Young educators do not show defensive or xenophobic attitudes, neither when cultural exchange takes place in their own country nor abroad.
- Young educators do not minimize differences when they talk about themselves, but consider them valuable. They notice cultural differences and value them positively.
- Young educators seem to consider themselves very tolerant on the personal exchange, but not in a cultural relativist kind of way.
- Young educators do not discriminate on religious identities.
- Young educators do not feel threatened by religions and do not show a high level of defense. Religion does not generate a defensive attitude or fear.
- Young educators do not consider themselves religious or believers, but show religious sensitivity and accept that religious beliefs are valid for its holders.
- Young educators are self-reported as tolerant and expect others to be tolerant with them too.

Some bivariate analyses were also taken, in order to explore a kind of relationships among items and sample variables (gender, age, birth place, etc.). By analyzing Spearman's rho, two variables came up as relevant for further analysis: gender (0.001) and religious identity (0.003).

In order to establish a significance between the two associated variables, we applied chi-squared tests for each one of the associated variables: gender and religion. To determine the statistically significance of the result, we grouped the categories of interreligious sensitivity into two, an average–low category and another high–maximum category. This new categorization provided the following observations: (1) gender is related to religious sensitivity, but with low significance (0.002 chi-square; 0.153 Cramer's V), and (2) religion is related to religious sensitivity, but with low significance (0.038 chi-square; 0.089 Cramer's V).

3.2. Results from Phase 2

The outputs from phase 1 revealed some critical issues to be explored through a qualitative approach. In order to dive into educators' voices and learn more about the meanings of their responses, six discussion groups were organized (for further information, see Section 2.5 of this paper). These groups provided rich information about their beliefs, values, and expectations. To make the whole qualitative analysis accessible, the results are shown according to two sub-sections: (1) the emerging values that the educators expressed themselves with respect to diversity, and (2) their reflective thinking on interfaith dialogue and religious beliefs.

3.2.1. Values on Diversity

Three dominant values emerged from educators' voices when expressing opinions, beliefs, and ideas on diversity. One first value that came up from the educators' voices when thinking on diversity was the value of the difference. The educators identified that diversity is mostly associated with difference in society and that this difference is often used to promote inequality and absence of human rights. This difference that leads to inequality was essentially viewed by educators from two major approaches: one of a socio-cultural nature (identities) and one of a socio-economic nature (standard of living).

> We don't all start from the same base, some people start from privileges that others don't have, and basic needs vary depending on what you have in mind as "basic". (GD2, 04:04)

> Everyone has the same rights, no matter where you are from or where you come from. Diversity is a close value to us. (GD3, 03:04)

A second value that emerged from educators' voices was empathy. In the discussion groups, empathy was expressed through two factors: knowledge and social contact. Empathy can only be felt if there is enough knowledge about the target of it, and social contact becomes the most useful strategy to achieve it. Knowledge is seen at different levels: information, comprehension, and/or application. Educators consider that empathy cannot stay at a level of knowledge but must reach at least a level of comprehension, which implies getting involved in a specific social context. Finally, there is an idea about the relativity of maturity regarding empathy: being more expert does not necessarily imply being more empathetic.

> I think it's living with people from other cultures, because if you don't know them and don't live a little with them as their day-to-day life is, it's hard for you to empathize with them. You can't empathize with something you don't know what it is. (GD5, 03:13)

> I think that, first, it is to know the culture, therefore, to know it, you either research or talk to the child about that culture, and then try to understand the meaning of things. (GD5, 03:40)

> Nowadays, many people have gone abroad for a year, or have a friend who is from abroad... in the end this makes you understand the other person more, this more direct contact with other cultures. (GD2, 06:30)

> Maybe being older allows you to empathize more in some cases because you've lived it or had the opportunity to live with people who have lived it, but it can also be just the opposite, and say "I've lived it so it went wrong for me" and then you judge negatively and understand less. (GD6, 08:56)

Diversity as a whole is for sure one of the most powerful values in educators' minds. They understand diversity from a radical perspective: there is not one "us" and one "them" but a radical plurality of individuals, a super-diversity (Crul et al. 2013). Educators explain two approaches to the concept: diversity as a reality (in its multiple dimensions: culture, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.), and diversity as a project, the construction of a diverse world. Cultural diversity is seen as one of the most relevant dimensions, and it is regretted the link between cultural difference and economic inequality.

> Every boy and girl is a whole world, and everyone is different in some way. (GD4, 02:39)

> That it is not all homogeneous. Different groups, opinions, experiences... both culturally and economically, of age... The wider the spectrum of diversity, the better. (GD6, 01:14)

> We are promoting internal scholarships for children who cannot afford it, precisely some of them are immigrants and this is adding to diversity at a cultural level in this case, but it is true that it is something that is not our comfort, this kind of diversity. (GD5, 06:45)

3.2.2. Reflective Thinking on Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Diversity

For the interviewed educators, religious sensitivity might be a first step towards interfaith dialogue, although it is a concept that not all of them understand. Educators state that it is necessary to know other religions in order to be able to understand them and connect with them, with close reasoning to that on the empathy. And this is due to their lack of knowledge about religions. They are honest at that point and declare that their ignorance can cause a triple obstacle towards a n interfaith dialogue: it does not help to have a religious sensitivity; it can lead to disrespectful actions; it can cause fear, rejection, or contempt. For that reason, they believe that contact with people of other religions or beliefs may help them connect with religious experiences as well as increase their practice on spirituality.

> Religious sensitivity, the word as such I personally do not quite understand. (GD1, 10:59)

> I think I would distinguish between being respectful of a religion and being sensitive to that religion. (GD1, 14:30)

> Understanding a religion helps you a lot to understand a culture's way of understanding the world. (GD5, 11:41)

> I think I do have a religious sensibility. [...] I like it a lot, and I connect more and more with religions and the way they treat spirituality. (GD5, 10:49)

> Yes, there is respect, but yes, there is an ignorance that can create a bit of disrespect and you do not know it. (GD1, 11:54)

Since contact with people with other beliefs than theirs plays a prominent role for educators, we provide more information about that. Those educators who have not had contact with people of other beliefs showed a wide range of attitudes regarding this contact, from indifference to motivation to get in touch. As for those educators who have had contact with people of other beliefs, a wide range of answers also emerged, which we could

order on a scale of rating experiences from the most negative to the most positive. In the first place, there are those who explain that the contact involved a clash on controversial issues or a difference of viewpoints. Others showed surprise, without adding a negative or positive assessment. On another level, we found educators reporting tolerance, acceptance, respect, or normalization, minimizing the importance of diversity in favor of equality and without personal attachment. Finally, there are those who value the experience of contact from the point of view of comprehension and empathy, breaking stereotypes, and promoting personal enrichment and group growth. Nevertheless, all of them agree that if diversity is present in people's life from an early age, religious diversity might become normalized at elder stages and then facilitate interfaith dialogue.

> There is always a certain suspicion towards these people (...) because they do not integrate. There is a lot of racism. (GD1, 13:43)

> I think specifically with a Muslim guy. Being in contact with them and learning about their religion enriched me personally, but I did clash a lot on more controversial issues. (GD2, 13:58)

> The way to manage it many times is from respect, that is to say we are all the same, nothing happens. (GD4, 23:29)

> When we had the Muslim educator, I think our group learnt a lot in terms of diversity. She used to say "oh, and why don't we do it this way, or why don't we do it that way". I rate it positively. (GD5, 14:12)

> We, the Catalan culture, all live the same, we all work in the same way, we believe the same, and the moment you don't get out of this loop you think that everyone lives like this, and the moment you see a person with a different identity shocks you, yes, but if that person is your best friend since childhood or sits next to you in the classroom, when you're older you'll say... a black person, yes, well, so what? (GD6, 12:45)

Finally, we also explored the value of having faith for educators, since faith is a pre-condition for any kind of interfaith dialogue. On the concept of "having faith", the educators showed unanimity in two aspects. First, they confirmed the results obtained in phase 1 in this research, that is to say, that everyone has faith in something. Secondly, they disassociated the fact of "having faith" from religion. Instead, they mostly associated it with "having hope", with a vital human need to believe in something and with the need to give non-rational explanations in some vital moments (specifically moments of difficulty).

> I think our conception of the word "faith" is no longer linked to the church or religion. (GD1, 23:37)

> The human being has the need to believe in something abstract that gives him an explanation for many things that happen to him, and the need to have the hope that something good will happen to him. (GD1, 22:56)

3.3. Results from Phase 3

The discussion groups were also an opportunity to explore the educators' thinking on two structural issues that directly affected to them in terms of moving towards interfaith dialogue: public policy and training. Apart from values, beliefs, and expectations related to diversity or interfaith dialogue, they also introduced rich information on what social preconditions should be set up in order to create a positive ethos in their leisure time groups.

Regarding public policy, educators positively valued networking among different stakeholders (public administration, experts in interfaith dialogue, leisure time organizations). They believe that this networking might promote interfaith dialogue, but they expressed their disagreement with implementing public regulations to promote that interfaith dialogue. They stated that a regulatory frame would indeed introduce a disturbing element in what should be a natural process. As a matter of fact, what they expect from public bodies is economic support for facilitating the inclusion of children and youngsters

in vulnerable situations rather than norms on how to promote interfaith dialogue. They also claim for aids to have fluent communication with families with a minoritized background, most of them belonging to minority religious communities.

According to this general educators' state of mind, we formulated a draft proposal of policy recommendations addressed to both local and regional authorities, and this set of policy recommendations was analyzed and improved through a Delphi process by 12 experts. The final set of recommendations after two rounds of consultancy can be found in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Policy recommendations to improve interfaith dialogue in leisure time education.

Policy Recommendations to Increase the Educators' Knowledge on Interfaith Dialogue
• Promote the organization of open days, discoveries, and workshops at places of pray worship addressed to leisure time education. • Facilitate access to the map of religious centers in Catalonia through ICT apps and social networks commonly used by teenagers and young people. • Open a reflective space on the intercultural approach that leisure time education can develop when dealing with the communication and the management of religious diversity. • Celebrate intercultural days with diverse young people. These days are an opportunity for exchange and review, assessment, and deconstruction of ethnocentric practices. • Organize annual face-to-face meetings for discussion and debate with leisure time educators, with case analysis and experiential activities on how to include and manage interfaith dialogue in the daily educational project. • Include attitudes, skills, and concepts on spirituality, cultural and religious diversity, and interfaith dialogue in the educators' training curricula. • Set up a mechanism for monitoring and assessing the impact of a sensitive training curriculum on spirituality, religious diversity, and interfaith dialogue.
Policy Recommendations to Facilitate the Educators' Networking for Interfaith Dialogue
• Organize national and international conferences between leisure time education leaders and religious organizations to promote innovation and knowledge transfer on the subject, as well as develop a set of good practices. • Promote collaboration agreements between the regional administration and leisure time education federations to facilitate networking. • Set up a permanent commission made up of representatives of the leisure time education federations and representatives of the main religious organizations in Catalonia, with the aim monitoring the progress in the implementation of these measures. • Negotiate the creation of a specific commission on spirituality and interfaith dialogue at the International Association of Educating Cities. Promote a specialized network of cities committed to this theme.
Policy Recommendations to Create More Equity Conditions for Children and Youngsters in Vulnerable Situations
• Encourage the implementation of leisure time education in social contexts with the presence of teenagers and young people with minoritized religious identities. Provide a preventive and proactive approach. • Integrate mediation experts in the leisure time education federations, with an expertise in specialized in religious conflicts, and offer training to educators on this dimension. • Create a support team on spirituality and interfaith dialogue at a local level, and promote community action by engaging leisure time education, minoritized religious groups, and citizens in community-based projects.

Turning our attention into training, educators stated in the discussion groups that there is currently neither sufficient and adequate training on interfaith dialogue. But educators introduce a distinction on what this training should be. On a conceptual level, they generally value that training in this interfaith dialogue can help them to be more aware, to give the importance that religious diversity deserves, to manage conflicts better, and eventually to become better educators. However, on a practical level, they consider that interfaith dialogue is not a training priority, and this should be placed as a complementary topic after the core contents of the training.

Nevertheless, once the need of training on interfaith dialogue is expressed, educators also show their preferences on how the training curriculum should be. They propose a theoretical part to define concepts and increase curiosity, as well as a skills-focused part, dealing with diversity management and conflict resolution. Regarding the methodology, educators ask for both theoretical contents and experiential training, as well as peer learning activities. They consider that sharing experiences and getting in direct touch with diverse

realities would be mostly welcomed. The training should be structured in different levels of complexity, and there should clearly be a component of implementing activities in their daily educational routine. We point out some of their voices about it.

> For me there should be two parts to such a training: the theoretical basis, in which we should first understand other religions, and once we have minimally dealt with that, a more applicable basis of how we deal with diversity to our groupings, or how we can treat it. (GD1, 31:13)

> When leaders do training, much of what interests us is how to implement new actions with children. (GD1, 32:00)

> I think it should be taken into account that you don't start from the same base with everyone. There are people who may not consider themselves to be of any religion, and there are people who may be. Then some concepts or some ideas, not everyone would be starting from the same base. The first thing would be to define the concepts, to arouse everyone's curiosity, and then from there everyone would find their own interest in learning about other cultures. (GD5, 22:45)

> For me, the one that would appeal my attention the most would be through experiences of other educators. (GD5, 23:15)

> I think it would be cool if people from the cultures (. . .) that you could talk directly with them, solve doubts, have their opinion, how they would like things to be done in the group, how they would live it. . . (GD5, 24:01)

> I believe that it should be more focused on the resolution of conflicts, and ethnic and religious conflicts, than more training focused on different types of culture. (GD1, 30:38)

According to all these pre-assumptions, and what is mandated by law (Order BSF/192/ 2015; Generalitat de Catalunya 2015), we drew a four-level training curriculum on interfaith dialogue and religious diversity for educators in leisure time education. This proposal was coherent with the most recent research and institutional literature on the topic (Sáez and Sánchez 2019; European Commission 2019; Fajardo and Pineda 2019; Fundació Pere Tarrés 2022), and we submitted it to a Delphi process of analysis and improvement. The output of this process can be found in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Curriculum of educators' training curriculum on interfaith dialogue and religious diversity.

Level 1: Introduction	
Training goal	To be aware of the existence of cultural diversity, religious diversity, and beliefs in the leisure time education, according to the sociological context of their institution as well as the 18th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
Assessment indicator	The educator introduces religion and beliefs when planning and implementing their educational project.
Concepts	Religion and spirituality as a general and relevant issue for humankind. Conceptual relationship between culture, religion, spirituality, and belief. Relationship between these concepts and social organization. Positive value of spiritual experiences.
Attitudes	Openness. Respect. Dialogue. Diversity. Critical thinking.
Skills	Religion and beliefs in daily life and the annual calendar of activities: food, sleep, swim, play, pray. Ritual practices or spiritual practices to share and related to non-formal education methods. General knowledge of mainstream religions: origins, beliefs, dogma, celebrations, and related emotions (fear, hope, anger, guiltiness).

Table 5. *Cont.*

Level 2: Beginner	
Training goal	To know the core elements and the group dynamics related to religious diversity in the society in general, and in the leisure time education in particular.
Assessment indicator	The educator introduces spirituality, cultural diversity, religious diversity, and beliefs when planning their educational project.
Concepts	Conceptual relationship among confessionality (confessional, non-confessional, aconfessional), religion (religious, laic, laicist), and diversity (ecumenism, interfaith, plurality of beliefs). Prejudices and stereotypes related to culture, spirituality, religious diversity, and beliefs.
Attitudes	Curiosity. Appreciation. Admiration. Empathy. Positive value of spiritual, cultural, and religious expressions.
Skills	Religious festivities and celebrations in leisure time education from an inclusive perspective. Introduction to a spiritual life and exchanges with religious diversity and beliefs.
Level 3: Advanced	
Training goal	To manage intercultural and interfaith dialogue in leisure time education, with a special focus on parents and according to the current legal framework.
Assessment indicator	The educator manages activities and relationships to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue.
Concepts	Religions and beliefs in Catalonia today. Contextualization of religion and beliefs in the local context of the leisure time education organization.
Attitudes	Participation.
Skills	Relationship with parents and with religious groups in leisure time education. Educators' awareness: how to increase it. Dialogical religious gatherings: how to plan and participate.
Level 4: Expert	
Training goal	To implement preventive measures against discriminatory behaviors and attitudes in contexts of cultural and religious diversity, as well as conflict solving.
Assessment indicator	The educator implements actions to prevent discrimination with the support of human rights organizations and other external stakeholders.
Concepts	Intercultural education, anti-racist education, ideologic radicalization, discrimination.
Attitudes	Civic engagement.
Skills	De-construction of prejudices and stereotypes on religious diversity and beliefs. Conflict solving in the field of interfaith dialogue. Training of trainers on intercultural and religious diversity, as well as on interfaith dialogue, by using critical thinking and participatory methods (role-playing, critical incidents, etc.). Dialogical religious gatherings: how to assess impact and improve practices.

4. Final Remarks

Our research has been an applied exercise to find evidence that allowed us design practical proposals for improvement and innovation, mainly in the field of public policy and educators' training. However, it has also provided enough knowledge for a better understanding of leisure time educators from a double approach: as educators, as well as youngsters. In this section, as a final reflection of our research work, we would like to discuss some trending topics that came up from the educators' voices and that became inspiring when reflecting about youth and interfaith dialogue.

First, it is clear, through both the questionnaires and the discussion groups, that young leisure time educators are open-minded citizens, with a high sensitivity towards cultural and religious issues. However, this positive attitude makes a contrast with their poor understanding about cultural and religious diversity. They state a lack of deep knowledge about religion, religious diversity, and of course interfaith dialogue. Therefore, interfaith dialogue cannot be seen as a starting point but as a final destination of a long journey that starts with intercultural education and smoothly moves to more complex forms of understanding religious diversity, spirituality, and the dialogue among people with different religious identities and beliefs.

Young educators declare a positive sensitivity and a poor knowledge on religion and religious diversity, but this does not mean that they do not manage daily situations when religious diversity appears in their groups and they have to deal with it. Then, interfaith dialogue comes up in a natural way as a reactive position in front of a reality that has to be managed. And the case stories that they explain about their management can be considered as good practices. Nevertheless, it seems that this is not enough in order to create a rich educational atmosphere in terms of interfaith dialogue. If we wish to go beyond a reactive position with respect to interfaith dialogue and become more proactive and innovative, the educators themselves provide some keys to achieve it. First, to institutionalize the practical experiences on interfaith dialogue that daily life offers. Second, to be aware of the importance of this dialogue, as an essential part to respect the otherness, and set up a human rights ethos in leisure time education. Third, to systematize the practical knowledge that educators obtain thanks to the concrete experiences they live when playing the role of educators. And fourth, to create new educational situations that do not necessary come up from participants' religious identity but from the search of interfaith dialogue beyond their own groups.

Since young educators acknowledge a good attitude and a bad knowledge on cultural and religious diversity, especially on interfaith dialogue, they accept that institutional measures ought to be taken in order to improve their current situation. They accept that public bodies and training institutions could help fill this gap, but not in any way. From the public bodies, they do not expect regulations but resources and support, and they ask for training courses based on peer learning and experiential methods. They do know what they wish, and their voices are clear on that.

Finally, those who assume responsibilities for designing and implementing supportive policies or training courses for educators in the field of interfaith dialogue need to be aware of one of the core outputs of our research. Young educators express a positive attitude towards religious diversity, but not in terms of developing a specific religious identity. What is more, their voices explain certain rejection towards whatever is related to religion, even if they are leisure time educators in confessional organizations. However, the same voices accept the need of having faith, of believing in something that goes beyond a material reality and a present time. They consider the existence of transcendence. This dissociation between religion and belief should inspire those who work for an interfaith dialogue among youngsters. Perhaps instead of "interfaith dialogue", we should conceptualize an "interbelief dialogue"; instead of "religion", we should talk about "spirituality". New conceptualizations that come closer to what youngsters really feel and think about religion and religious diversity.

Our last words are devoted to a critical reflection of our research work. Methodologically, we focused our attention on young educators in order to explore the reality of interfaith dialogue in leisure time education in Catalonia. Since the educators play a prominent role and are privileged informers, we still consider that we made a good choice. However, we need to accept the limitations of our study, since we did not plan to have access to other participants' voices (children and their families), to religious communities, to the public administration, or even to other youngsters that are not educators in leisure time education institutions. Regarding the questionnaire, further analysis could have been taken, and comparisons to other international groups would have been revealing. We also have to admit, moreover after the second phase and the discussion groups, that some ethnographic observation could have been extremely powerful in order to achieve a better understanding of some factors that required further comprehension. And thinking in the future, we look forward to observing to what extent our policy recommendations and training framework will be considered by authorities and leisure time education trainers. If some of these recommendations or training contents are implemented, we will be pleased to start new research processes to assess their impact in leisure time education environments.

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