



## The Attitudes Of The Future Socio-Educational Agents Toward Religious And Cultural Diversity

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### Abstract

The map of different religious expressions is a challenge for coexistence in the public space, and for the education of future educators. We present the challenge of religious diversity in the educational context, analyzing how is the attitude of future educational agents to this religious diversity, to interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and to the role of education in managing this diversity.

It has conducted a survey study in the framework of a Project (AGAUR-2014RELIG00019) on attitudes of students in Teacher Training in Primary and Children, Social Education, Social Work and Social Education, with the "Attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity in education for intercultural dialogue and interfaith scale".

The results highlight the importance that the students of the different universities give to the contents on religious diversity and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, despite their lack of curricular presence. It has a very favorable cultural and religious diversity attitude, interreligious dialogue, and especially reluctant to that education plays an important role in the management of religious and cultural diversity.

However, participants in the study do not see it as important to incorporate religious content into compulsory basic education (compulsory primary and secondary education). These last results regarding the basic formation, we believe that they are given with respect to a concept of religious formation that is what has traditionally been developed in the traditional catholic religious formation.

It should improve the training of future educational agents across grade levels to meet the challenges of religious and cultural diversity in the educational framework.

### 1. Introduction

Currently in Catalonia we are seeing a situation of cultural diversity emerging which is also bringing with it a wide variety of religious practices. This represents a challenge for coexistence in the public sphere and at the same time for the education system and for future educators. Faced with the huge responsibility stemming from this religious diversity, training for socio-educational workers who play a special role in this area is also crucial.

Education is particularly important in addressing the challenge of religious diversity; thus here we study the attitudes of future socio-educational workers towards religious diversity, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and the role of education in the management of diversity. The specific objectives we aimed to respond to were:

- To analyse the attitudes of future socio-educational workers towards intercultural and interreligious dialogue.
- To identify factors relating to these attitudes.

### 2. Method

In order to address these objectives a diagnostic study was carried out, by means of a survey, of the attitudes of students on Primary and Infant Education, Social Education, Social Work and Pedagogy degrees. These students will be the future socio-educational workers who in both formal and informal fields will be able to approach the issues from an intercultural and interreligious dialogue perspective.

The population included in the study comprised the final-year students at the faculties of Pedagogy, Social Education, Social Work and Teacher Training at four Catalan state universities: the University of Barcelona, Rovira i Virgili University, the University of Lleida and the University of Girona (we

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should note that not all of these universities offer all of the subjects mentioned). The sample consisted of a total of 574 students from the 2014-15 academic year.

Since the total number of students on the final year of the degrees was 2,250, this resulted in a 22.5% response index with an error of 0.037.

As with the student population as a whole the sample was mainly female: 84.8% women as opposed to 15% men. The average age was 23, although with a certain amount of variation (a high standard deviation at 4.86343). The vast majority were born in Catalonia (92.7%), with 4.7% born in the rest of Spain and only 2.6% outside the country.

Given the lack of instruments specifically designed to measure attitudes to religious diversity and intercultural dialogue, especially in education, we created the 'attitudes towards religious/cultural diversity in education from the standpoint of intercultural and interreligious dialogue scale,' based on a needs analysis with academic experts, the public administration and social organisations (Vilà et al. 2015). Checking the content of the instrument against the opinions of these experts yielded a scale of 49 items, all agreed to be appropriate by the judges. The instrument was considered valid and reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906.

### 3. Results

60.7% of the students stated that they were not religious. 17% thought that some religions were better than others, and a worrying 79% thought that there were religions which were less open to interreligious dialogue than others.

Although 49.1% of the students stated that they had had some experience of religious diversity in the socio-educational field (for example, in external practicums), only 14.6% had studied religion in any way in the course of their degrees. However, 46% had studied it in other educational contexts.

72% of participants stated that their university training for promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue was insufficient. Similarly, 74% believed that as future socio-educational workers it was important for them have training in these issues. 73%, however, believed that there should be no religion in basic compulsory schooling.

The results obtained from the scale showed that participants' scores for attitudes were relatively low, especially concerning the role of education, where an average of 21 points out of 75 was recorded. In other words, the students had attitudes that were not particularly favourable to cultural and religious diversity or interreligious dialogue, and were especially resistant to the idea that education should play an important role in managing religious and cultural diversity and promoting interreligious dialogue.

Students at the University of Barcelona stood out, with slightly more favourable attitudes than the rest of the sample. These differences were statistically significant only in the dimensions of the scale on attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity. In particular, students at the University of Barcelona had a more critical attitude towards discrimination (discrimination against some religions as a source of conflict and discrimination against women), particularly when compared with the University of Girona, where scores were lower. University of Barcelona students also registered higher scores in their attitudes towards the presence of religious and cultural diversity in the public sphere, especially compared with the scores of students at the University of Lleida, who were less favourable to such public diversity.

Sorting results according to participants' degrees, we observed statistically significant differences in scores on the attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity scale, both in the scale totals and in the scale's three dimensions. In general it was noted that students on the Social Education and Social Work degrees were more favourable towards diversity, while on the Pedagogy and Teacher Training degrees students were less favourable. Social Work and Social Education students were the least unfavourable to cultural and religious diversity in general (scale total). In particular, Social Education students stood out for having the least unfavourable scores towards religious and cultural diversity when taking into account the factors that favoured or hindered religious diversity. These figures were particularly statistically significant when compared with the Infant Education and Pedagogy degrees.

Further, students on the Social Education degree also had the least unfavourable attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity, when taking into account different types of discrimination which they involved (discrimination against certain religions as a source of conflict, discrimination against women, etc.). This difference was statistically significant especially when compared with the degrees of Infant Education, Pedagogy and Primary Education.

Social Work and Social Education also had students with less unfavourable attitudes towards the presence of cultural and religious diversity in the public sphere, especially comparing Social Work with Pedagogy, and comparing Social Education with the rest of the degrees.



Participants with experience of cultural diversity, for example in external practicums, had less unfavourable attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity, interreligious dialogue and the role of education. Students who stated that they had had experience of religious diversity in the socio-educational sphere registered scores that statistically were significantly higher than those who had not, both in the totals for the three scales and in some dimensions.

Students who stated that they had experience in religious and cultural diversity were, in fact, those who were least unfavourable to diversity (especially in terms of its presence in the public sphere), interreligious dialogue (especially considering the conceptual side of religion and dialogue), and the role of education in the management of religious and cultural diversity (especially in terms of formal education and university education for socio-educational workers).

#### 4. Conclusions

A primary conclusion is that students' attitudes as a whole were not particularly favourable to cultural and religious diversity, interreligious dialogue, or (particularly) education playing an important role in managing religious and cultural diversity.

The need for university training on these subjects was identified, as experts have already remarked (UNESCO, 2005; Torradeflot, 2011; López, 2012). Our results suggest that, despite the current attitudes of future socio-educational workers and their lack of university training in these issues, they feel the need for such training due to the search for education found in other areas and the presence of the issues in their day-to-day lives, including their teaching experience in external practicums.

This data demonstrates the importance that students from the different universities give to training on religious diversity and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, despite the low profile of these subjects on the curriculum. However, participants did not see the inclusion of religious education in basic schooling (compulsory primary and secondary education) as important. In our view this is because the students' concept of religious studies is akin to Knitter's (2008) substitution model, which is that traditionally imparted in Catholic religious schooling.

Another conclusion is that the human geography of Barcelona, with its greater religious and cultural diversity, and with the numerous initiatives for intercultural and interreligious dialogue that the city offers, may lie behind the less unfavourable attitudes of its future socio-educational workers towards cultural and religious diversity, especially in terms of discrimination and presence in the public sphere.

These results suggest that we should analyse further the roles of education and of the future socio-educational workers on the Primary and Infant Education and Pedagogy degrees, but without losing sight of the need to further develop the other degrees, which, although they were slightly less unfavourable towards diversity, still showed relatively low scores.

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