

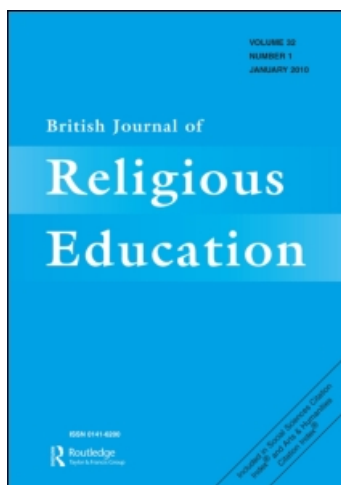
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Under the shadow of Al-Andalus? Spanish teenagers' attitudes and experiences with religious diversity at school

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Religious education (RE) is a persistently 'hot topic' in contemporary Spain. Although nominally Catholic, majority Spanish society tends to be sharply divided with regard to the issue of religion in education: more conservative and Church-attending parents approve of the still overwhelming presence of Catholic teachers, trained and chosen by the Catholic Church, who teach (confessional Catholic) religion in both public and confessional primary and secondary schools. More liberal or progressive parents reject this 'intrusion' of the Church as reminiscent of 'national Catholicism' and favour a strict state–Church separation similar to the French *laïcité* model. This bipolar conflict has become more complex recently. The current dynamics of pluralisation of confessional RE at school, which is currently being implemented in several pilot primary schools in districts with high percentages of Muslim (particularly Maghrebien) as well as Protestant (increasingly Latin American) immigrants, meets strong resistance, not only from the Catholic Church, but also from those who struggle for a completely 'laicist' solution. The following analysis of qualitative and quantitative questionnaire data designed and collected in the frame of the comparative REDCo project ('Religion in Education: a contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries, sixth framework programme') presents an approach to youngsters' attitudes and experiences with confessional RE.

Keywords: religion; education; youth; models of religious education; Spain; REDCo project

Introduction

Religious education (RE) in contemporary Spain is still heavily shaped by two long-lasting traditions: firstly, the self-perception of Spanish society as being homogeneous in religious terms, and, secondly, the close interrelation and

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frequent institutional overlapping between the Catholic Church and the Spanish nation state. Both traditions are deeply rooted in historical continuities, which still have strong consequences for present-day societal and educational reforms. Spanish society has been predominantly Catholic. Back in 1994,¹ 81.2% declared themselves to be Catholic, whereas only 4.6% identified themselves as non-believers; furthermore, 32.1% of the population identified as non-practising believers. Nowadays, the majority of Spaniards, about 75.5%, identify themselves as Catholic, although the percentage of non-believers has risen to 13.4% and in general ever more people identify as non-practising believers.² According to a poll carried out by CIS in February 2010, 57.6 % of those who declare themselves to be part of a religious tradition do not practise their religion at all.

In the educational domain, certain features have persisted since the Franco regime, particularly the existence of a mixed, three-fold school system which reflects the deeply rooted tradition of transferring educational competences to the Catholic Church. For the compulsory school years (primary and secondary education for students aged 6 through 16 years) and for the non-compulsory pre-university *bachillerato* (16 through 18 years), there are three school types: public schools, which are originally owned and run by the central state, but which in ever more regions are now transferred to the autonomous communities' governments; state-subsidised private schools, which are mostly owned and run by Church institutions, congregations or orders, but which are nearly completely subsidised by the state or the regional government; and completely private schools.

Until very recently, and despite Spain's rich history of religious pluralism (cf. Dietz 2007), as a result of the long lasting tradition of state and Church induced homogenisation described above, non-Catholic religious communities hardly existed in contemporary Spanish mainland society. Although Protestant, Jewish and Muslim communities have slowly started to (re)settle in several Spanish cities since the 1970s, they were not visible until the 1990s, when this type of movement began to grow, thanks to the international impact of migration. This is the case for the Protestant communities, who are currently the most successful non-Catholic congregations with regard to their internal organisation, their broader claims and their access to RE. In addition, Muslim communities are the most important, most visible and most stigmatised communities in contemporary Spain. According to unofficial estimates, based above all on the predominant 'religion of origin' of mainly Moroccan and Algerian immigrant populations, approximately 1,000,000 people may identify themselves as Muslims.

These demographic changes, which pluralise the 'religious landscape' of the country, are forcing the Spanish state to reconsider the privileged treatment it concedes to the Catholic Church and its relationship to non-Catholic denominations in all societal domains. Throughout this very recent process, the legal framework of religious pluralism is being modified, which requires

changes both in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and subsequently in the 1980 Law on Religious Freedom and in the cooperation agreements with religious denominations.

RE in Spain: 'past and present'

Reflecting the slow 'transition' towards de-monopolising the position of the Catholic Church in public schools, RE as a subject has been reformed step by step through each new educational reform (Gasol 1997; Llerena Baizán and Llerena Maestre 2002). Since the beginning of the Civil War in 1936 until 1977, RE, understood only as Catholic RE, had been a compulsory main subject of instruction during the primary, secondary and pre-university levels (Rodríguez Sanmartín 1988; Dietz 2007). The legal situation changed with the 1978 Spanish Constitution. Its Article 16 guarantees religious freedom, which makes compulsory religious instruction unconstitutional; on the other hand, Article 27 of the same constitution emphasises the right of all parents 'to obtain for their children a religious and moral instruction which is coherent with their own convictions' (Constitución Española 1991). Although the parents' right to obtain RE for their children does not imply necessarily or automatically that it has to be delivered in public schools (Tarrés and Rosón 2009, 181), *de facto* it does, ever since it has been interpreted as a state obligation. This interpretation is consistent with the Church's educational privileges, as included in the 1979 Concordat.

Currently, the legal situation of the subject is being reformed and counter-reformed. The former Conservative government had tried to fulfil its promise towards the Catholic Church to strengthen the position of RE by abolishing the non-religious alternative and by plainly integrating two alternative subjects into the core curriculum: both the confessional subject of *Religión* (católica) and the non-confessional subject of *Hecho religioso*, conceived as an introduction to the history of religion (Llerena Baizán and Llerena Maestre 2002; Esteban Garces 2003). Subsequent debates, mainly emphasising above all the presence of the crucifix in the classroom, have been among more or less secularised Catholics. The landslide victory of the Socialists in the elections held in the shadow of the 11 March Madrid bombings paralysed this conservative reform, which is now being replaced by a new educational law. This maintains the current practice of RE, but – for the first time – explicitly states that RE will be taught 'in compliance with all signed agreements', not only with the 1979 Concordat. Furthermore, the distinction between a confessional and a non-confessional subject of RE is adopted from the conservative draft regulation, but is supplemented by a third subject, citizenship education,³ which will be compulsory during one year in primary and two years in secondary education.

Since this reform process of the 1990s, politicians, Church authorities, teacher unions and parents' associations have continuously debated the

problematic aspects of the position of RE in public schools (*Comisión Episcopal de Enseñanza y Catequesis* 2005): the concrete conditions and ways of integrating RE into the overall curriculum, the subject's equal or unequal treatment in relation to other subjects, its numerical impact on the grade average and the role, choice and payment of RE teachers. Despite these debates, from a formal point of view, RE is today taught from the first grade of primary education (six years old) until the first grade of post-secondary education (*bachillerato*; 16- to 17-year-old students).

With regard to the different school types, from a total figure of 5,009,178 students,⁴ about 1,041,208 attend subsidised Catholic schools, representing approximately 20.8%⁵ of all Spanish students attending compulsory and pre-university educational levels. Of all private and subsidised schools, 79.1% are owned by members of the *Federación Española de Religiosos de Enseñanza-Titulares de Centros Católicos*, which transfers the school administration to another Church-run entrepreneurial organisation, called *Educación y Gestión*, which administers 2082 schools and employs approximately 77,998 teachers;⁶ 6261 of these teachers (8.03%) are members of religious orders.⁷

Mostly Spanish middle and upper class parents send their children to these schools, which are generally not considered of better 'teaching quality' (Fernández Enguita 1990); in interviews conducted in southern Spain, the main reasons mentioned by parents for choosing these schools are always the same: that they are supposed to be 'better equipped' and that they are more selective and socially more homogeneous than public schools. The strong presence of the Catholic Church is, however, not limited to its educational engagement through its own schools. As many teachers of public schools have been educated themselves in Catholic schools and/or have been trained as teachers in Church-run pedagogical teacher training schools, they tend to be very receptive and tolerant towards Catholic elements of 'moral and value education' in public schools. Consequently, even public schools show an overt presence of Catholic religious symbols, liturgical traditions, practices and festivals.

Besides, in all public schools, Catholic RE is plainly and autonomously designed, organised and offered by the Spanish Conference of Bishops' Commission for Education and Catechesis. Catholic RE is still chosen by a huge majority of students, but the percentage of involvement has been constantly diminishing over the past few years: in primary education, it has decreased from 90.82% (academic year 1996–1997) to 76.44% (academic year 2007–2008) of all students, in secondary education, Catholic RE only reaches 61.5% of all students, and in pre-university level only 51.31% of all students attend Catholic RE, while 48.63% of students choose 'study activities' (cf. *INE curso* 2007–2008).⁸

Analysing in depth the most recently available figures, provided by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science for the academic year 2007–2008,

Table 1. Religious education and its alternatives in the different school levels.

Subjects	Primary level				Secondary level				Pre-university level
	1st and 2nd	3rd and 4th	5th and 6th		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st
Shared			Education for citizenship and human rights (50 h)	Education for citizenship and human rights				Civil-ethnic education	Philosophy and citizenship (70 h)
Free choice	(105 h) RE Educational support	(105 h) RE Educational support	(105 h) RE Educational support	(105 h) RE alternatives: –Religion –History and culture of religions Educational support	(105 h) RE alternatives: –Religion –History and culture of religions Educational support			(105 h) RE alternatives: –Religion –History and culture of religions Educational support	–Religion

only 0.68% of the total number of 2,607,384 students attending Spanish schools were receiving a minority confessional RE in primary school: only 7040 students were receiving Protestant RE, 10,430 Islamic RE and 261 Jewish RE, whereas 1,993,084 took Catholic RE and 596,569 participated in the alternative 'assisted study activities'. In secondary and pre-university levels, only Catholic RE (for 1,125,373 secondary school students, i.e. 61.50% and for 300,005 pre-university students, i.e. 51.31%) and alternative assisted activities (for 653,448 secondary school students, i.e. 35.72% and for 284,336 pre-university students, i.e. 48.63%) were offered. This means that in the final school years of *bachillerato*, the non-Catholic confessional RE was nearly completely absent: 0.06% (350 students) both in Islamic and in Protestant RE, while Jewish RE did not exist at all (0.01%) at this level (cf. INE *curso* 2007–2008).

An empirical research study of RE

In the context of these slow, but ongoing transformations with regard to RE and religious diversity in contemporary Spanish society, we have carried out between 2006 and 2009 the Spanish part of the European project 'Religion in Education: A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict transforming societies of European countries' (REDCo; www.redco.uni-hamburg.de). The main aim of the project was to establish and compare the potentials and limitations of religion in the educational fields of selected European countries and regions in order to identify approaches that can contribute to making religion in education a factor promoting dialogue in the context of European development. For this reason, we used quantitative and qualitative research methods, with the aim of having a detailed portrait of young people's attitudes and opinions. We were sympathetic to the ethnographic grounding of the interpretive approach, which was a stimulus to REDCo research (Jackson 1997). A relevant point of departure for our research was the fact that the ultimate target and supposed beneficiary of RE, Spanish youth, are very rarely consulted about their views, opinions and perceptions on religion or on learning about religion at school.

For practical as well as empirical reasons we decided to focus on those sites where we were conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the framework of our local REDCo project. Therefore, both the quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were distributed in secondary schools in three regions or 'autonomous communities': Andalusia, Murcia and Melilla. The regions were chosen in order to diversify the sample internally with respect to the following bases of comparison: (1) urban versus rural (Granada and Melilla versus Murcia); (2) emerging versus established region of immigration (Murcia versus Granada); and (3) strong tradition of mono-religious presence versus long existing religious diversity (Granada and Murcia versus Melilla). In broad terms, the data collected in the rural and urban, public and private

schools on the Iberian Peninsula reflect typical features and trends of contemporary Spanish society, both with regard to gender, social class and religious belief. The Melilla data, on the other hand, are exceptional in the sense that they do not reflect the overall Spanish situation, basically because autochthonous Spanish Muslims are nearly nonexistent in mainland Spain. Nevertheless, for the central issues of this project the situation in Melilla constitutes – for good or bad – a ‘social laboratory’ of future Spanish multi-faith society, which is why we included such a large ‘extreme group’ sample from this population.

In our qualitative sample, four schools were chosen in Granada and Murcia: one Catholic confessional school in Granada, one public school in Granada and one public school in Murcia. Only four Muslim students of Moroccan origin participated in the mainland Spanish questionnaires, so the large majority (88.88%) hold Spanish citizenship, are monolingual in Spanish and come from a Christian-Catholic background. In the case of Melilla, three schools participated in the qualitative questionnaire: one mixed public school and two public schools. Nearly half of the interviewees are male and half are female. Both majority religions present in Melilla were included in the sample: 46.88% of the participating students were Muslim and 43.75% were Catholic. Only 9% declared themselves as non-believers, atheists or *mestizos*, a term used in Melilla for children from mixed, Christian–Muslim marriages. All interviewees hold Spanish citizenship (a post-dictatorship achievement for the Melilla and Ceuta Spanish Muslims), and most of their parents were also born in Spain. Only 9.45% of the parents were born outside Spain, mostly in northern Morocco. Nevertheless, in sharp contrast to the mainland Spanish sample, half of the students speak Chelja/Tamazigh or another oral variant of the so-called Berber or Amazigh languages.

The qualitative research was done using a written questionnaire, which was completed by 113 pupils in the age group of 14–16 years: 81 in Murcia and Granada, of whom 53 were female (65.43%) and 28 male students (34.56%); and 32 in Melilla, of whom 17 were female (53.13%) and 15 male (46.88%) (Dietz, Rosón, and Ruiz 2008).

On the basis of our qualitative analyses the REDCo team developed a quantitative questionnaire (cf. Valk et al. 2009). Our survey started in January 2008 and was completed in March 2008. In Spain, we selected six schools in Andalusia, one in Murcia (a total of seven schools in the Peninsula), and seven in Melilla,⁹ and samples of 14- to 16-year-old students in their second or third year of secondary education. These schools follow different RE models, have different gender balances and present different levels of ethnic-religious diversity. We feel, therefore, that they reflect the religious and social plurality of Spain. The sample includes the opinions of 381 female (56.1%) and 298 male students (43.9%) from a total of 679 surveyed (one no answer) (Rosón and Álvarez Veinguer 2009).

Teenagers' attitudes towards inter-religious cohabitation: 'reproducing confessional models'

If we analyse the result from the qualitative questionnaire, often echoing the debate which is currently going on in Spanish politics and media about the future of RE, the main reason the students express themselves in favour of maintaining religion as a subject in school consists in the necessity to 'know about one's own religion' (MUSfch).¹⁰ The respondents emphasise the aspect of information and knowledge. In other cases these arguments are often extended to the necessary knowledge of 'religions in general' and of 'other people's religions and customs', which seems to be an argument expressed particularly in public schools, not in confessional ones. Students believed that learning about different religions helps them to learn about their own religion (mean = 2.2).¹¹ Whereas some students stress the 'right to know from which religion they come' (MEE_mch), others suggest maintaining and expanding RE in order to 'have some place pupils get information about topics of religions, living together, etc.' (GRL_mch). Several students make the point that religious knowledge should be shared by all students, independently of their own belief. The necessity of recognising all religions and not only Catholicism in RE is particularly often pinpointed by Muslim students, both by migrant students living in the Spanish peninsula and by native Muslims in Melilla.

Nearly all of them indicate that 'if there are classes of Christian or Catholic religion, then classes for Islamic religion are also to be allowed'. In their view, 'either all religions are offered or none of them' (MEE_{mm}u). Two kinds of reasons are mentioned: on the one hand, it would be discriminatory if Muslims were prevented from having their own RE classes; on the other hand, these RE classes should provide information and knowledge about each other's beliefs as well. However, this potentially inclusive and inter-religious character of RE is not agreed by all interviewees. Although they are generally positive about RE, for them RE is synonymous with Catholic RE – a subject which should never be compulsory, neither in public nor in Catholic schools, and which should be offered only to 'Catholic believers'. In their opinion, atheists, Muslims and others should attend alternative classes of 'ethics' or 'other subjects'.

This broadly positive view of RE contrasts with a rather strong minority of students, who strictly oppose any RE at school. In the context of increasing religious pluralism and diversification, some interviewees, mostly Muslim ones, argue that precisely because society is increasingly diverse and people from ever more religions coexist, the school should not offer a place for any faith at all. For them, introducing the different religions into the school would create more barriers among students. Some Catholic students, as well as many Muslim ones, suggest that in order to avoid conflicts and barriers at school, the family and particularly the parents should be in charge of religious

instruction, not the school. An Amazigh Muslim girl from Melilla proposes that ‘Castilian religion [sic!] should be taught at school, but Islamic religion as well. And as they won’t offer all religions, the best thing is that we learn about our religions at home and so we save hours for other things at school’ (MEEfmu).

In the quantitative analysis of this point we observed that for the majority of students, RE classes help them to understand others, live together and learn about different religions. This forms part of what is desirable in RE classes. However, it does not specifically correspond to the national model where RE classes, as we previously mentioned, mostly focus on the religion itself as the only alternative (Catholic religion). This was seen more clearly in the qualitative analysis in relation to what contents should be included in RE; overwhelmingly, the contents of RE are conceived of as knowledge, as information to be transferred from the RE teacher to the students. This cognitive approach reflects the prevailing didactic practice of (Catholic) RE in Spain. The interviewees can be classified into two groups: on the one hand, those who propose confessional and mono-religious contents, and on the other, those who suggest either supra-confessional or multi-confessional topics. It is difficult to generalise from the sample which group might be stronger, as they seem nearly to be of the same size (Dietz, Rosón, and Ruiz 2008).

Multi-confessional claims are well illustrated with the following sentence: ‘they should stop forcing us towards one religion through their talks, which in my opinion are deceitful’ (GRImnr), as explained by an atheist boy attending a Catholic confessional school. ‘Knowledge about other religions’ and ‘the history of all religions’ should be included in RE. Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism are mentioned as ‘religions we have to learn about’. Students are particularly interested in these religions’ ‘customs’ and ‘feasts’, in ‘their Gods’, ‘their beliefs’ and their ‘current situation in their countries’ (GRCmmu).

We need to emphasise, however, that most students deemed it necessary to obtain objective knowledge of world religions (mean = 2.3),¹² as well as to learn about and understand their teachings (mean = 2.4), so that they can converse on religious topics (mean = 2.4).¹³ Finally, the model where all religions are represented in one classroom was not considered positive (mean = 3.5), but the extreme variability of responses restricts the significance of this result (SD = 2.4). The variability was related to non-believers who, while rejecting this model (mean = 3.7) more than believers, varied extremely in their responses (SD = 3.7) (Rosón and Álvarez Veinguer 2009).

In relation to students’ opinions on whether the teacher should be ‘religious’, our research found rather opposed views. A huge group of students, particularly the most convinced and explicit believers, could not think of an RE teacher who ‘does not practise what he teaches’. In their shared view, somebody who does not believe will not be able to transmit his or her knowledge about the particular religion and will not ‘convince us’. These

interviewees conceive the RE classes in confessional, catechism-like terms: ‘a teacher of Catholic religion has to be a Catholic, of course’ (GRLmch), one pupil states. Another half of the sample, however, expresses the opposite opinion. In the view of these pupils, teaching RE is like teaching any other subject; therefore, in order to be able to teach about religion, ‘you should know about religion, not believe in it’ (MEEfch).

One reason the interviewees argue against using only believers as RE teachers is the increasingly pluri-confessional composition of many classrooms. As pupils will often come from Catholic, Muslim or atheist families, a teacher who openly shows he/she is from one belief may create problems among the class or in his/her relation with the parents.

In our research we also asked students what model of RE they preferred, a confessional model where they are taught RE in separate groups according to their affiliation or a non-confessional model where they are taught RE together. The answers given by the pupils with regard to the preferred ‘model’ reflect contemporary debates in broader society. It is precisely this question where few pupils express a mere lack of opinion; the huge majority seems to have a firm stance on this issue.

If we analyse our quantitative data in relation to preferred models of RE (see Figure 1), we perceive that, firstly, students preferred a model where RE is optional (mean = 1.7). Moreover, they somewhat agreed that RE should be separated by religion (mean = 2.5), but the answers varied considerably (SD = 1.3). This would correspond with the current situation. We stress, however, that

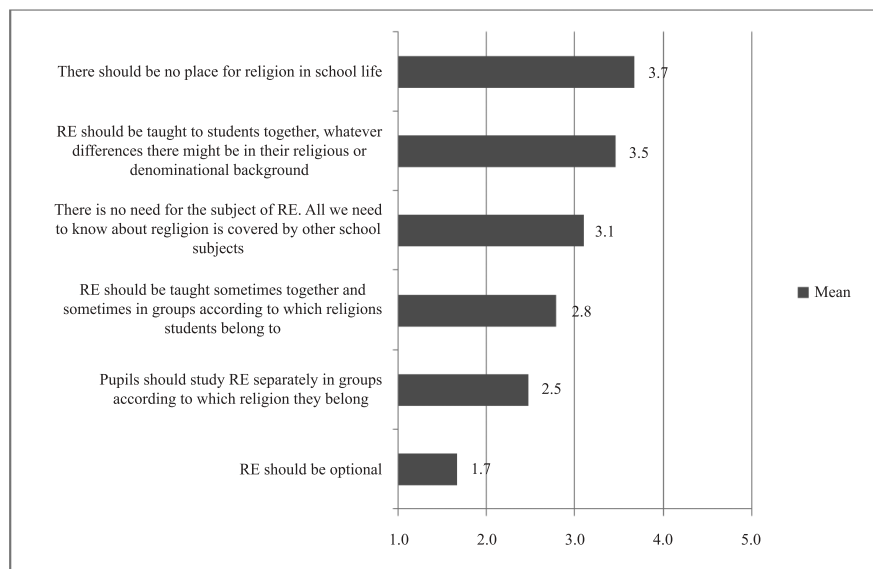


Figure 1. Preferred models of religious education.

Note: Means of estimates, scale from 1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly disagree.

most¹⁴ students deemed it necessary to obtain objective knowledge of world religions (mean = 2.3), as well as to learn about and understand their teachings (mean = 2.4), so that they can converse on religious topics (mean = 2.4).

Likewise, we should underline that most interviewees are in favour of maintaining or reintroducing (in secondary level) religion as a subject at school. This opinion is expressed by both pupils attending Catholic confessional schools, where Catholic RE is obligatory, and those attending public schools, where Catholic RE is optional.

However, they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' that learning about religion is necessary to solve social problems (mean = 2.7). As for a model which would include both joint and separated education they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' (mean = 2.8). Finally, the model where all religions are represented in one classroom was not considered positive (mean = 3.5), but the extreme variability of responses restricts the significance of this result (SD = 2.4). The variability was related to non-believers, who while rejecting this model (mean = 3.7) more than believers, varied extremely in their responses (SD = 3.7).

In the quantitative analysis of this point, a minority of respondents approve of joint and shared RE classes where they could learn together about religion, in general, and different religions, in particular. The arguments given in favour of this model are of two different kinds. Most of the proponents of this approach reflect the above-stated interest in 'knowing more' about other religions. Apart from knowledge-related arguments, several pupils express concern about possible consequences arising from confessionally separated classrooms. 'I would not like being put apart' or 'I would feel bad if I have to leave in the religion class' are preoccupations often shared. However, this opposition towards separate religion classes is not shared by the huge majority of respondents. Most pupils prefer being taught about their own religion separately from pupils pertaining to different faiths. The first argument against shared religious instruction is provided particularly by those pupils who are atheists and/or who express laicist positions with regard to religion in school. In their view, common RE classes would imply that they end up being 'compulsory' for any student, even those who are 'just not interested' in religious matters. Reflecting the poles of current public debate, focused on the compulsory versus complementary nature of (Catholic) RE and on the existence of non-religious educational alternatives such as 'ethics' or 'citizenship education', several pupils understand that shared RE would be not only compulsory, but also implicitly confessional – classes in which the RE teacher anyway would go on 'professing his faith'.

This rejection of common, inter-faith RE classes is also found in the case of those students who approve of and enjoy current confessional Catholic education. In their view, forcing 'a Muslim or an atheist' to participate would be 'rather violent' or 'a real mess' for all. As the objective of RE is still conceived as a matter of the promotion or affirmation of one's own faith, the presence of non-believers is seen as a merely disturbing factor inside the

classroom. In the opinion of a Catholic girl, 'it is better independently, not because of racism, but for better comprehension. If not, it would be more a debating class, not a class of religion' (GRIfch).

The defenders of confessionally segregated RE tend to suppose that pupils from other creeds will not be interested at all in 'other people's faith'. This attitude favouring non-mixed classes seems to reflect an essentialist notion of 'religion' and 'belief'.

Finally, there is a tiny minority who disapproves of the distinction between common versus separate classes for RE. Several students insist that it depends on the content and the nature of each class to be taught. They propose having shared classes providing information about different religions, their history and customs, but to separate pupils according to their particular faith for confessional classes.

We emphasise that the majority of those between 14 and 16 years old have not known or been able to opt for any religious instruction/education other than Catholicism. Likewise, they have not known until recently any educational model other than the traditionally implemented.¹⁵ In this context, it stands to reason that most of these students associate religion and RE classes with their own faith, and from this point of view, consider that the most appropriate model is the one currently being carried out: confessionally separated RE.

Nonetheless, examining the responses obtained within the framework of the project, it is interesting to note that most students considered that learning about religion helps to understand others, live peacefully together and better understand the history of their country. This suggests that the harmony and coexistence sought by multicultural societies (through dialogue, respect and tolerance) contrasts with the values of the very religions whose disagreements these societies seek to overcome. In this case there is little real coexistence and interaction with the 'other', seeing that religion classes are segregated by faith.

Given the above, the first noteworthy finding was that most Spanish students 'agreed' that at school they learn about different religions and this helps them to live together (mean = 2.3). Likewise they agreed that they learn to respect others regardless of religion (for believing students, mean = 1.7; for non-believers, mean = 2).

Conclusions

Although a huge group among the interviewees demands further information and deeper knowledge, of both their own religious traditions and particularly about other faiths, many pupils – consciously or not – still stick to a confessional, nearly catechism-like notion of RE. Both Catholic and Muslim students perceive the official recognition of religious diversity in the classroom and its potential treatment by confessionally neutral teachers. Furthermore, as our context data from ethnographic interviews show, the solutions proposed and the approaches preferred by the interviewees, reflect a strong influence by

their parents as well as by the currently ongoing media debate on variants of and alternatives to confessional Catholic RE.

Most Spanish interviewees are in favour of maintaining or reintroducing religion as a subject at school (not only Catholicism, but also Islam), at secondary level. They consider that students should be taught in separate groups. Some of the respondents envisage changes toward a multi-religious class. A minority of adolescents expressed a *laïcité* point of view, considering religion to be a private matter. An important proportion of the Spanish students (half of the sample) want to learn about their own confession, which indicates confessional tradition and heritage in student conceptions of RE.

As far as teaching methods are concerned, the views of the Spanish interviewees mentioned knowledge and information delivered by teachers to students. They are not used to sharing their personal religious experiences with their classmates and do not seem comfortable with that kind of approach. As far as religion and education are concerned, Spanish adolescents appear to be quite conservative. Most of them promote the model of teaching they have experienced: confessional RE in Spain. Different national models appear here as a product of a long history of relationships between state, Church and school, and students have internalised them (Álvarez Veinguer and Béraud 2008).

Notes

1. According to the CIS poll from October 1994.
2. As this poll does not distinguish between different religions, the percentage includes believers from different religious backgrounds without regard to any specific denomination.
3. This new subject, called 'education for citizenship and human rights' or 'civilethic education', according to the different grades, was introduced in the sixth grade of primary school and is being taught throughout all secondary school grades (cf. Table 1).
4. Cf. Statistics and Archive Services of FERE-CECA and EyG (2008–2009).
5. The percentage rises to 21.25% in the case of the compulsory educational levels.
6. In total, there are 95,353 teachers in these schools, of whom 7039 (7.38%) are members of religious orders. Of these the church-run schools have 77,998 teachers, of whom 6261 (8.03%) are members of religious orders. Cf. Statistics and Archive Services of FERE-CECA and EyG (2008–2009).
7. With regard to the number of pupils in these Catholic schools, in primary education there are 535,483 in total, of whom 444,425 (83%) attend these schools. In secondary schools, there are 415,602 pupils, of which 347,902 (83.71%) attend these schools. Finally, at pre-university level, from a total number of 103,203 students, 84,308 (81.69%) attend these schools. Cf. Servicio de Estadística y Archivos FERE-CECA y EyG (2008–2009).
8. Instituto Nacional de Estadística. La enseñanza de la religión. Curso 2007–2008 [National Statistics Institute. The teaching of religion. Year 2007–2008]. For more details see <http://www.ine.es> (p. 6).
9. With the aim of guaranteeing the anonymity of the schools, we eliminated names and explicit references to them from the discussion of the research findings.

10. For the interviewee acronyms, see the explanation in the Appendix.
11. Means from here on are calculated on the Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.
12. Means of estimates, scale from 1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly disagree.
13. Standard variation for these figures is 1.0 with a low standard deviation. This indicates a small degree of dispersion in the answers and a general average close to the central value (agree).
14. This means that 61.3 % of the students strongly agree or agree and that only 8.5% disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. Similar levels apply to other questions where ‘most’ is used.
15. Ethics, ‘society culture, religion’, education for citizenship, religious facts, etc., have been the only non-confessional alternatives.

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Appendix. Details of questionnaire coding and interviewee features

City and school	Gender	Religion
GRI = Granada Catholic confess. school	f = female	mu = Muslim
GRC = Granada public urban school	m = male	ch = Christian
GRL = Granada public semi-urban school		nr = no religion
MUS = Murcia public rural school		me = <i>métis</i>
MEV = Melilla mixed public school		
MEJ = Melilla Muslim majority public school		
MEE = Melilla Catholic majority public school		

Example: MEVfmu = Melilla – mixed public urban school – female – Muslim

MUSfch = Murcia – public rural school – female – Christian