

## FORUM

JOHN MAIDEN 

## From Archives to the Classroom: Using Religious Archives to Promote Religious Literacy and Toleration amongst European Young People

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This article examines the thinking behind the Religious Toleration and Peace (RETOPEA) project, and specifically the construction of a digital archive of sources concerning religious diversity in Europe and beyond, past and present. It argues that European young people tend to accept Enlightenment assumptions about the past and ‘religious conflict’ and that their views of religious history are shaped by ‘presentism’. The article explores RETOPEA’s approach to selecting, preparing, and curating a digital archive which presents to young people a fuller picture of both religious intolerance *and* tolerance in the past, and which enables them to think ‘with’ history rather than assume simplistic lessons from the past.

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In 2018, as part of an academic project called Religious Toleration and Peace (RETOPEA), I visited a high school in North-East London. The day’s task was to hold focus groups with young people, exploring their views on religious diversity in history and the present-day. As historians, the academic team wanted to obtain a baseline of understanding to innovate in engaging young people with historical sources on religious diversity in ways relevant to contemporary challenges and experiences. In my notes of these focus groups, it is telling that when the conversation turned to history, inter- or intra-religious encounters were understood in almost entirely negative terms, alongside mentions of genocide, racism, “holocaust,” “civil wars,” “Christians against Muslims” and Protestant–Catholic conflict.<sup>1</sup> The view of history which the young people were presenting can be situated into a well-established set of Enlightenment assumptions about the religious past and modernity.

These Enlightenment assumptions have produced a conscious and sub-conscious narrative about the progress of “tolerance” which understands it to have emerged out of a religiously violent European past. Two historians involved in RETOPEA, Patrick Pasture and Christophe Schellekens, describe this as a “usual narrative,” one which assumes that “increasing tolerance has emerged as a reaction to the intolerance of religions and their mutual exclusivism.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars increasingly question this narrative. What might appear to

Head of Department and Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

1. Author’s notes of RETOPEA workshop in north-east London, 2018.

2. P. Pasture and C. Schellekens, “Religious Diversity in Europe: the Challenges of Past and Present” in *Religious Diversity in Europe: Mediating the Past to the Young*, ed. R. Altnurme, E. Arigita and P. Pasture, (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 15–32, at 30.

be “religious conflict” can, it is now more frequently recognised, have roots in non-religious factors. In 1997, for example, Marc Gopin asserted that religion has “a dual legacy in human history,” claiming:

Throughout the long era of human history religion has been a major contributor to war, bloodshed, hatred, and intolerance. Yet religion has also developed laws and ideas that have provided civilizations with a cultural commitment to critical peace-related values. The latter include empathy, an openness to and even love for strangers, the suppression of unbridled ego and acquisitiveness, the articulation of human rights, unilateral gestures of forgiveness and humility, interpersonal repentance and the acceptance of responsibility for past errors as a means of reconciliation, and the drive for social justice.<sup>3</sup> Medieval Spain is one pre-modern example of tolerance sitting alongside inter-religious enmity. The medievalist Chris Lowney says of Spain’s Muslims, Christians, and Jews that they “embraced and rejected each other’s faith traditions and customs, fought alongside each other and against each other, occasionally tolerated their neighbours and somehow forged a golden age for each faith.” Tantalisingly, Lowney goes further, suggesting that in the wake of the Madrid bombings of 2004, “They allow us some glimpse of what a common society might look like.”<sup>4</sup>

However, while historians have moved towards nuanced understanding of religious co-existence across different times and places, European classroom curricula has tended to remain attached to the established Enlightenment narrative. The purpose of RETOPEA was to address this problem. How might we detach an emerging generation from such conventional wisdoms and historical generalisations? Furthermore, as Lowney hints, could it be that a more sophisticated understanding of religious history has something constructive to offer in the present? For the RETOPEA team, this required the identification of a corpus of historical sources which would more accurately reflect the range of experiences, and lived paradoxes, of historic religious diversity in Europe. The project would seek to create a digitised archive experience for European young people — but also ensure that sources were presented in ways accessible and relevant to them. Furthermore, it would require innovative approaches to engage young people with these sources and which might develop historical skills to think *with* history. What follows explains the rationale behind RETOPEA’s approach to the selection and presentation of historical archive material, and the creative pedagogies adopted to teach these sources effectively.

The European Commission-funded RETOPEA project ran from 2018 to 2022 and involved universities, schools and other stakeholders in England, Belgium/Flanders, Germany, Finland, Estonia, Spain, North Macedonia, and Poland. The broad objectives of the project were twofold. First, the team aimed to develop a corpus of source materials, specifically curated for young people aged 13–18, on religious (in)tolerance in historic and contemporary Europe. The historic materials addressed treaties and settlements with a religious dimension. The (digital) archival approach of the project raised a number of important issues. As we will see, the project team would need to think carefully about principles of source selection, for example, not limiting the corpus to those reflecting “top down” elite agency in the making of peace treaties and settlements. The team also grappled with issues around curation: the online corpus of sources which RETOPEA aimed to produce would need to be presented in ways which fostered critical engagement by and with young people. The second objective was to develop a methodology which would enable young people to engage creatively with these sources — and not only to think like historians, but make connections between the past, current events and their own experiences.

3. M. M. Gopin, “Religion, violence, and conflict resolution,” *Peace and Change*, 22, no. 1 (1997), 1–31, quotes at 22 and 2.

4. C. Lowney, *A Vanished World: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Medieval Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 14.

As we shall see, the approach taken here was to involve young people in making short films, called “docutubes.”

The approach taken by the RETOPEA team was informed by a series of focus groups across the different European countries included in the project.<sup>5</sup> The discussions were intended to cover four broad issues, addressing young peoples’ perceptions of:

1. Media representations of religion and religious diversity, past and present (questions such as “How accurate or inaccurate,” fair or unfair, do you think different types of media are when they discuss different religious groups?).
2. Religious diversity in the past (e.g., “Historically, how religious diverse do you think your city/town/country/Europe has been? Are there any particular ‘turning points’” when either of these became more or less religious diverse?).
3. Religious diversity in present-day society (e.g., “In the present day, to what extent do you think religious diversity offers benefits or challenges to society?”).
4. Potential connections between approaches to religious diversity in the past and present (e.g., “Are there ways in which we can learn from history?”).

Focus groups for young people aged 13–18 took place in England (four), Belgium/Flanders (three), Germany (two), Finland, Estonia, and Spain. Additionally, a focus group involving 18–25 year olds took place with the help of an NGO stakeholder in North Macedonia. We looked at a range of schools — non-religious and religious, ethnically/religious diverse and homogenous; however, as these groups only involved a total of 132 students in six European countries, we do not claim to have a comprehensive or representative data base. Rather, in the absence of any other European-wide comparative literature addressing specifically views of the youth on religious diversity in *history*, these “snapshot” discussions were intended to provide background for the project objectives. The focus groups, mediated through the notes of local representatives of the RETOPEA project, provided some helpful indicative insights.

First, in nearly all the focus groups there was a tendency to underestimate religious diversity in the past. In the UK schools, for example, research notes of the discussions indicate only two individual mentions of *non-Christian* religious diversity pre-1945. There was an underpinning assumption amongst the young people that religious pluralism in Britain was a product of post-1945 “New Commonwealth” immigration. Writing in 1994, Peter Bishop argued that the ideas that “multicultural Britain” and a religiously plural society are something *new* is a “common and misguided assumption, reinforced by political rhetoric and the discourse of race in Britain.”<sup>6</sup> A study of the controversial 2014 History National Curriculum in the United Kingdom found that despite the “strong appetite amongst both teachers and pupils for a more diverse curriculum,” the new curriculum represented “a largely exclusionary, monochrome and defended ‘Britishness’, which has erased our more controversial and contested past and placed ethnic minorities firmly on the margins of British history.”<sup>7</sup> A notable exception where the wider tendency to ignore pre-1945 diversity was concerned was the focus group held in Granada, where there was awareness of “great religious diversity” and contributions of different traditions to cultural

5. For more on the methodology, results and analysis of these focus groups, see J. Maiden, S. Sinclair, P. Salmesvuori and K. Van Nieuwenhuysse, “Views of the Young: Reflections on the Basis of European Pilot Studies” in *Religious Diversity in Europe: Mediating the Past to the Young*, ed. R. Altnurme, E. Arigita and P. Pasture, (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 33–49.

6. P. Bishop, “Victorian Values? Some Antecedents of a Religiously Plural Society” in *Belonging to Britain: Christian Perspectives on Religion and Identity in a Plural Society*, ed. R. Hooker and J. Sargant (London: CCBI Publications: 1991), 31.

7. C. Alexander and D. Weekes-Bernard, “History Lessons: Inequality, Diversity and the National Curriculum,” 2017, [https://research.manchester.ac.uk/files/48680320/48680288.History\\_Lessons\\_journal\\_article.docx](https://research.manchester.ac.uk/files/48680320/48680288.History_Lessons_journal_article.docx) (accessed 13 June 2023).

development.<sup>8</sup> However, given the wider context of State-promoted “muscular” liberalism and citizenship in early twenty-first century Europe, it is likely that curricula trends elsewhere have been similar to the UK, underplaying the significance of historic multicultural diversity. Furthermore, in the rather different case of North Macedonia, where distinctive historic and contemporary factors have produced continued ethno-religious polarisation not dissimilar to the north of Ireland, the young people (albeit of the older 18–25 age bracket) believed that teaching with religious content tended to be nationalistic.<sup>9</sup> Such broad insights from the focus groups underlined the responsibility of historians and archivists alike to draw attention to material which highlights historic religious diversity.

Second, there was a tendency in focus groups for young people to emphasise ostensibly key “turning points” in either national, or occasionally European-wide, religious history. In the English schools, students’ references to religious tolerance/intolerance often drew on the examples of the reign of Henry VIII and the Holocaust. In Tartu, Estonia, the Reformation was regarded as a key moment in religious history; as well as the persecution of religions during the Soviet period.<sup>10</sup> In one school in Mainz, Germany, students drew on a slightly larger number of perceived turning points: the Roman occupation, the Protestant Reformation, the Nazi regime, and the arrival of migrants (particularly Turkish) in the post-war years were discussed.<sup>11</sup> Although some students in the same school were aware of the example of a local synagogue destroyed during the Holocaust, generally speaking in the RETOPEA focus groups students’ local and family histories did not seem to inform their construction of the past. Where these did, these could be rather uninformed. In a school in Cheshire, England, students assumed that during the industrial revolution “religion had been pushed to the margins;” and therefore, given that students lived in an industrial town, they believed their vicinity had “little religious past.”<sup>12</sup> The lack of awareness of local religious history is particularly important to note, as young peoples’ views on present-day religious diversity were primarily shaped by their immediate environment and family setting.

Third, and most importantly, the focus groups revealed an absence of awareness of historic examples of religious toleration. Again, with Granada being an exception, youths tended to understand a perceived religious past as intolerant and contrast this with a markedly better present-day situation. As one student in Flanders commented: “societies in the past were ten thousand times more religious than nowadays. And the church forced people to believe in God. Nowadays, you can choose whether you want to be a Christian, or Muslim, or atheist; back then, you could not.”<sup>13</sup> A similar reading of historic religious diversity was evident in Tampere, Finland, where youths tended to make generalised points about the narrow-mindedness of religious traditions and an almost inevitable tendency towards violence. The workshop notes described the dialogue as follows: “The main problem with different religions was according to the students not the diversity but the claim that each religion said that they were the only right one. That led to continuous power fights, even wars.” Like in Flanders, students assumed a marked contrast between past and present: “One explanation was thought to be that people were less tolerant since they did not have the opportunity to travel and learn about different cultures and religions. Now people could travel to other side of Europe in three hours.”<sup>14</sup> Some students were

8. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Granada, 26 February 2020.

9. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in North Macedonia, 13 July 2020.

10. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Tartu, 2 October 2019.

11. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Mainz, 14 December 2018.

12. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Cheshire, UK, 18 October 2018.

13. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Flanders, 24 February 2020.

14. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Tampere, Finland, 17 May 2019.

perceptive enough to wonder if the history curriculum might skew their perspectives on the past. Students in Tartu were concerned that teaching on Christianity might tend to address the “bad sides of religion,” with one child (from a Christian background) arguing that a more general, rounded picture of religions was necessary.<sup>15</sup> Usually, however, the focus groups indicated that young people were unaware of examples of religious tolerance in history. Work was clearly needed to address these imbalances in understanding of the historical record.

Some views expressed in the focus groups were encouraging to the RETOPEA team. Young people tended to believe that subjects such as religious education and history should not focus solely on one religious tradition. In Granada, the workshop observer noted a view that schools were “very important in shaping the attitude of young people towards religious diversity” and that “If only the Christian religion is taught in these classes, the other religions are excluded as if they did not exist.”<sup>16</sup> At a Catholic-run school in Cheshire, UK, the students seemed acutely aware — particularly given they lived in a homogenous, white British area — that their school was not adequately teaching them about non-Catholic faiths.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, generally speaking, young people did not think that the past was unimportant; indeed, some explicitly asserted that history could inform present day thinking. As one young person in the Cheshire focus group reasoned: “If we don’t learn from history then what is the point of history?”<sup>18</sup> However, this “learning” was usually understood in the somewhat clichéd way of identifying mistakes from the past in order to avoid making them again.<sup>19</sup> This relates to the larger theme to emerge from the focus groups, which may not be surprising given the larger body of work on young peoples’ historical consciousness. As Bodo von Borries has argued, young people tend not to consider the past on its own terms, but rather look at it through a contemporary lens, based upon current societal opinions and their own experiences.<sup>20</sup> An aspect of this “presentism” amongst young people is the tendency towards a chronological snobbery whereby the present-day is automatically seen as morally and culturally superior to the past. This is illustrated in the view expressed by one young person at a focus group in the UK, about recent history. Intolerance was “generational:” those brought up in the twenty-first century inevitably were “likely to be more tolerant” than previous generations.<sup>21</sup> Overall, in the RETOPEA focus groups of European young people, we encountered a presentist epistemology: a historical naivety, coupled with a tendency to back-project their own experiences and societal assumptions

This presentism represents a major challenge to academic historians, educators of young people and also to archivists. The latter group is faced with a challenge of engaging young people with archives in the first place. Of course, it is unrealistic to expect many young people to visit physical archives, and therefore the tools of digitization can be invaluable. Historians and archivists alike may take, perhaps counter intuitively, some encouragement from another important insight from the focus groups. We found that young people simultaneously indicated that if students currently lack the critical tools to engage with the religious past, they are more than able to critique representations of

15. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Tartu, Estonia, 2 October 2019.

16. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Granada, 26 February 2020.

17. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Cheshire, UK, 18 October 2018.

18. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Cheshire, UK, 18 October 2018.

19. For one English comprehensive school student, the purpose of religious history was learning from “our mistakes.” RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Lancashire, UK, 17 March 2019.

20. Bodo von Borries, “(Re-)constructing History and Moral Judgement: On Relationships between Interpretations of the Past and Perceptions of the Present” in *Cognitive and Instructional Process in History and Social Sciences*, ed. M. Carretero and J. F. Voss (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 339–55.

21. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Lancashire, UK, 17 March 2019.

religion in the present. There was a near consensus across all the workshops that news media was biased in its representation of religion, either in its reporting on a specific matter, in repeated generalisations or an overall tendency to focus on negative news stories. Young people of both religious and non-religious backgrounds often regarded Muslims as particularly vulnerable to unbalanced media representation. Those from a religious background could be particularly aware of media bias against their group; however, they might also be more likely to recognise similar bias in relation to other traditions, perhaps due to a sense of empathy. In the English Roman Catholic-run school, for example, there was a feeling amongst a portion of the young people that Catholicism “tended to involve controversial or negative stories such as those concerning anti-abortion or child abuse in the Church.” One young person in the group also said of the influence of media representation: “a lot of people I know, when they think of Catholicism they think of paedophile priests, or when they think of Muslims they think of terrorists.”<sup>22</sup> Overall, there was a hermeneutic of suspicion where news reporting was concerned. This, of course, can be problematic if it means an endorsement of conspiracy theories about the so-called “fake news”. However, the capability of young people to deconstruct media framings of religion, and identify bias and generalisations, may also provide something which historians, archivists and teachers of history can “tap in” to, as they seek to help them engage critically with historical sources and incomplete or biased representations of the past.

Such considerations informed the making of RETOPEA’s corpus of sources, or “clippings,” as they were referred to by members of the project. As other authors in this special issue remind us, no archive is “neutral.” Issues of selection were paramount in early discussions within the project team, and these were guided by pedagogical priorities. How could the selections for the digital archive enable young people to develop a more rounded understanding of religious diversity and coexistence in historic societies? The chosen different treaties and settlements were each historic exemplars of strategies for negotiating religious diversity and coexistence. The approach of the peace of Westphalia, for example, was one of *forgetting* — an amnesty between all sides to facilitate a new beginning — and sources included excerpts from the agreement which highlighted this.<sup>23</sup> However, peace and toleration is not only a matter of high politics, but also the grassroots experience of conflict and coexistence. It was important to include sources which gave perspectives from below; hence the addition, for example, of an excerpt of the diary of Hans Heberle, a shoemaker from near Ulm, Germany. This expressed something of the relief of peace: “Therefore, we should ask for peace daily and hourly, for where there is peace there is happiness and blessing.”<sup>24</sup> There was also pedagogical issues addressed in source selection. We aimed to include a range of media — including text, visual (maps, paintings etc.), audio and audio-visual — where possible. For the peace of Westphalia, we included Gerard Ter Borch’s “The Swearing of the Oath of Ratification of the Treaty of Münster”<sup>25</sup> and a recently drawn map depicting the officially recognised religions in Europe in 1648.<sup>26</sup> By selecting a range of media we aimed to cater for different learning styles and assist students in building up a fuller picture of the context. The RETOPEA collection

22. RETOPEA project team, Notes of workshop in Cheshire, UK, 18 October 2018.

23. H. P. Jürgens, “Westphalian Peace, 1648: Paragraphs I and II,” [www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7642](http://www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7642) (accessed 15/11/2023).

24. H. P. Jürgens, “Westphalian Peace: Hans Heberle on the end of the war, 1650,” [www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7636](http://www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7636) (accessed 15 November 2023).

25. H. P. Jürgens, “Peace of Westphalia: ‘The swearing of the oath of ratification of the Treaty of Münster, 1648’, Gerard Ter Borch, 16-17-1681,” [www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7657](http://www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7657) (accessed 15 November 2023).

26. H. P. Jürgens, “Peace of Westphalia: The officially recognised religions in the European territories, 1648.” [www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7627](http://www.retopea.eu/s/en/item/7627) (accessed 15 November 2023).

exemplifies the ways in which educational digital archives are constructed according to the pedagogical purposes of its creators.

The team needed to address several practical and intellectual issues in the preparation of clippings for classroom use. To illustrate this, the following discussion refers to just one of these clippings: Article II of the 1578 *Religioensvrede* treaty between Catholics and Protestants in the Low Countries. On the RETOPEA website the clipping is entitled “Freedom to choose between Protestantism and Catholicism: *Religioensvrede* Article II of the treaty,” and includes the primary source, contextual background, and then various additional information in a drop-down menu, including questions for students, spatial and temporal coverage, and links to other clippings on the *Religioensvrede*.<sup>27</sup>

Four aspects of the clippings are salient: their accessibility, taxonomy, usability, and applicability. The source itself read as follows:

To avoid and prevent discord and debate, it has been ordered that anyone can adhere to either of the two religions (Catholic or Reformed), as he seeks to account to God. This diversity of religion may not be maintained, introduced or suppressed with arms. It should be done without disturbing anyone else. Everyone should be allowed to maintain previous religious ties as well as other ties. One should be allowed to serve God according to his own understanding and judgement. Everyone may choose his religion as he wants to defend it when he will be judged by God.

In terms of *accessibility*, the creator of the clipping wanted to ensure that the source was understandable to young people of high school age and therefore provided what they describe as “a liberal translation from the original into more modern, understandable English.” The RETOPEA team were encouraged to use the Flesch Kincaid readability ease calculator to assist the process of making the sources accessible to young people: with this example having a “reading ease” score of 63.4 — that is, one appropriate for 8th and 9th graders. Of course, this process represented the challenge to the academic team of maintaining as far as possible the integrity of the original text. In a corpus of over 400 other clippings, it also needed to sit in a sensible *taxonomy*. The clippings in the RETOPEA database are divided into 12 themes which also served as searchable categories: “Gender and sexuality,” “Migration, trade and travel,” “Propaganda, stereotyping and communication,” “Discrimination and being different,” “Ideas about toleration,” “Peace and conflict resolution,” “Memory and heritage,” “Law, police and public order,” “Places and buildings,” “Religious practice,” “Clothing and dress” and “Family life”.<sup>28</sup> Article II of the *Religioensvrede* is placed in the “Religious practice” category. The clipping also included metadata showing which other clippings are relevant to it; meaning young people can, for example, click on clippings about the “*Religioensvrede* and marriage,” in the “Religious practice” category, “*Religioensvrede* and singing” (about the prohibition of hurtful songs) under “Law, police and public order,” and on “The *Religioensvrede* and Spanish stereotypes,” sitting in the “Propaganda, stereotyping and communication” category.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of *usability*, the RETOPEA clippings have been constructed to facilitate critical historical thinking amongst the users. The intention is that young people should engage with actual sources, rather than just historical narrative. In order to place the source in context — and avoid students slipping into anachronisms — the clippings include background information. In this case, it reads:

27. C. Schellekens, “Freedom to choose between Protestantism and Catholicism: *Religioensvrede* Article II of the treaty.” See <http://retopea.eu/s/en/item/6061> (accessed 16 June 2023).

28. “Discover our collection”, <http://retopea.eu/s/en/page/clippings> (accessed 16/6/2023).

29. C. Schellekens, “*Religioensvrede* and Marriage” <http://retopea.eu/s/en/item/6073>; C. Schellekens, “*Religioensvrede* and Singing” <http://retopea.eu/s/en/item/6070>; C. Schellekens, “The *Religioensvrede* and Spanish stereotypes” <http://retopea.eu/s/en/item/6079>. (accessed 16 June 2023).

The Religioensvrede (1578) was an arrangement to allow the living together of Catholics and Protestants in the Low Countries. The Low Countries were a region that roughly covered current day Belgium and The Netherlands. In the years before 1578, the government of the Low Countries had only allowed Catholicism and had prosecuted Protestants. In regions taken over by Protestants, Catholics were treated badly and they encountered violence. The army of Spain supported the Catholic government of the Low Countries. The army's soldiers fought Protestants, but also harassed many Catholics. Moderate Catholics and Protestants from the Low Countries made peace with each other joined together in their opposition to the Spanish army. To sustain that peace, they developed a set of rules, obligations and prohibitions to facilitate that Catholics and Protestants could live together. These various measures were listed in the *Religioensvrede*.

The clipping also includes a question — “How much freedom to choose one’s religion does the *Religioensvrede* provide” — which is intended as a starting point for the student to engage with the source critically. These questions are also intended to demonstrate the *applicability* of the historical material. By using the modern terminology of “freedom of religion,” students are invited in the question to make comparisons and contrasts with the present.<sup>30</sup> Some of the questions invite considerations of connections between past and present quite explicitly. For example, the clipping “The Religioensvrede and Spanish stereotypes” in the shared taxonomy asks: “Have you ever experienced yourself how aversion against a person or group can bring people together?”<sup>31</sup> The purpose of these questions, and RETOPEA methodology in general, is not to invite simplistic “lessons” from the past, but rather to encourage young people to think “with” history in more nuanced ways — avoiding the pitfalls of presentism while also making links between history and the present-day. By encouraging deep engagement with actual sources, we hope too that less anachronistic views of the past are encouraged.

The RETOPEA clippings database can be used in the classroom in the context of history or religious education, or potentially lessons relating to citizenship. The project also developed a “docutube” methodology intended to engage young people with the clippings. The idea of this approach is that young people make short films, often similar in style to the “Vlogging” genre popular on platforms such as YouTube. A growing body of literature on pedagogy has pointed towards the benefits of creative learning, or as one scholar describes the “hands-on approach to learning, and a spirit of enquiry and questioning.”<sup>32</sup> The process of filmmaking — with an emphasis *on* the value of the process rather than the end result — is intended to encourage young people to move beyond awareness of historical facts, and foster skills of historical analysis. Furthermore, the emphasis is on connecting past, current affairs, and their own experiences. Up to November 2023, the project had worked with over 164 young people aged 12–22 in fifteen pilot workshops. These included workshops beyond the initial geographical scope of the RETOPEA project, as “follow-on” funding from the Culham St Gabriel’s Trust and the Open University allowed further piloting of the docutubes methodology both in the United Kingdom — including in Northern Ireland — and also in the Muslim majority contexts of Albania and Jordan. Feedback, collated by Stefanie Sinclair of the RETOPEA team, has indicated that the experience of making these docutubes has been overwhelmingly positive, with 81 per cent of young people believing that the docutubes process had helped them to think of religious peace and toleration in new ways; 86 per cent claiming it had helped them learn about religious peace and toleration; and 96 per cent, importantly, confirming that they *enjoyed* the

30. “Freedom to choose between Protestantism and Catholicism.”

31. “The Religioensvrede and Spanish stereotypes.”

32. D. Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 12.



process of making a film.<sup>33</sup> An online course has now been prepared by RETOPEA team members from the Open University, designed to enable teachers to run their own workshop, using the clippings database and the docutubes methodology.<sup>34</sup>

The RETOPEA project has sought to grapple with the notion that religion has been “the problem” in the past. Historians and educators have an obligation to present a fuller picture of both religious intolerance *and* tolerance. By exposing young people to historical sources concerning settlements such as the peace of Westphalia, the *Religioensvrede*, but also enabling them to develop historical skills in the process, it is to be hoped that RETOPEA will help address the problem of presentism where understanding of religious history is concerned. At a moment when populist and nationalist discourses about religion are increasingly evident, the value of allowing European young people to critically engage with representations of contemporary and past religious diversity is increasingly evident. In this climate the *ad fontes* approach of RETOPEA is also important. In an age of misinformation, the project aims to give young people the confidence to return to original source material, and so enhance both their historical and information literacies. By addressing these issues at an early stage, perhaps the next generations of young adults can become more aware that, as Wayne Te Brake has argued of early modern Europe, that “peaceful accommodation of religious differences was the rule, rather than the exception.”<sup>35</sup>

33. These include not only the workshops from the original RETOPEA project, but also workshops held in the UK, Albania and also Jordan. Figures are taken from the Open University team’s records.

34. “Young People and Religion: Creative Learning with History,” <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/religious-studies/young-people-and-religion-creative-learning-history/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab> (accessed 16 June 2023).

35. W. Te Brake, *Religious Peace, Then and Now* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2022), 3–4.