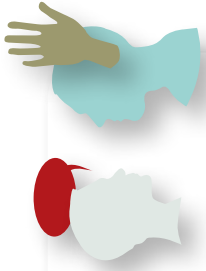




Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Language Policy Division



The **Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters** is a concrete response to the recommendations of the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity" (<http://www.coe.int/dialogue>), Section 5.3 "Learning and teaching intercultural competences", paragraph 152:

"Complementary tools should be developed to encourage students to exercise independent critical faculties including to reflect critically on their own responses and attitudes to experiences of other cultures."

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For further acknowledgements, please see the *Introduction*.

The views expressed in the *Autobiography* and supporting documents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Council of Europe.

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www.coe.int/lang



What is the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters?

This Autobiography has been designed to help you analyse a specific intercultural encounter which you have experienced. You do this by answering a sequence of questions about various aspects of that encounter.

An intercultural encounter can be an experience you had with someone from a different country, but it can also be an experience with someone from another cultural background in your country. It might be, for example, someone you met from another region, someone who speaks a different language, someone from a different religion or from a different ethnic group.

This focus is on **ONE** event or experience which you have had with someone different from yourself. For example, avoid talking in general terms about a holiday which you have had, and instead choose just one specific encounter or meeting which you have had with a particular person from another country or culture. It may be somebody you already know and have known for some time.

The event could be a visit to that person's house. It could be a meeting with someone from a foreign country or another region of your own country. It could be something that happened whilst on a trip abroad, and so on.

...



...

Here are some examples from other people:

- An English teenager met a foreigner for the first time in Turkey. She and her mother talked to him because they got lost in the town.
- A ten-year old girl went for a holiday to Egypt. There she got acquainted with a local girl of 11. They met on the beach and first communicated with the help of gestures. She learned that her parents worked at the hotel where her family was staying.
- A German boy went to stay at his friend's house. His parents came to this country from Japan but he was born here.
- A young Bulgarian woman got to know a Hungarian and a Turkish guy at an international airport in the US. She was intrigued by the different ways they responded to critically delayed flights.
- A university student arriving in France, frightened and tired, and being amazed at how friendly and caring the bus driver could be.
- A Bulgarian boy congratulating his Armenian friend on Christmas day and realising and feeling embarrassed that Armenian Christmas was on a different day.

Notice that the encounters can be in your own country, in your own neighbourhood, in your own home, in a foreign country or on a journey – in other words anywhere you happen to be.

Choose an experience which was important for you - it made you think, it surprised you, you enjoyed it, you found it difficult, etc., and **give the experience a name or title**, e.g. "My Turkish experience", "My first conversation in a foreign language", "Staying with a Japanese friend", "Delays at the airport", "Arrival in France", "The wrong day for Christmas"...

This Autobiography helps you to think about the experience by asking you questions about it. Try to answer the questions as honestly as possible. It does not matter if the experience is positive or negative.

All experiences are important.



Name

Encounter title and/or number

Today's date

Who I am (Optional)

How would you define yourself?

Think about things that are especially important to you in how you think about yourself and how you like others to see you.*

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*Here are some elements you may wish to include if you find them to be an important part of your identity: your name, age, gender, nationality, ethnic group, country, region or community where you live or come from, religion, languages, etc. Or you could include being a son/daughter, brother/sister, school student, member of a sports team, member of any other type of club, etc.



The encounter

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Name Today's date
Encounter title and/or number

Title

Give the encounter a name which says something about it...

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.....

Description

What happened when you met this person / these people?

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.....
.....

Time

When did it happen?

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.....

Location

Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

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.....

Was it... (please tick one or more)

- study -
- leisure -
- on holiday -
- at work -
- at school -
- other -

.....
.....

Importance

Why have you chosen this experience?

.....
.....

Was it because... (please tick one or more)

- It made me think about something I had not thought about before
- It was the first time I had had this kind of experience....
- It was the most recent experience of that kind

.....
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- It surprised me
- It disappointed me
- It pleased me
- It angered me
- It changed me

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Add any other reactions in your own words and say what you think caused your reaction...

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What else?

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Name Today's date
Encounter title and/or number

Name

Today's date

Encounter title and/or number



The other person or people

Who else was involved?

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.....

Give the name of the person or people if you know...

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.....

Write something about them...

What was the first thing you noticed about them? What did they look like? What clothes were they wearing?

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Were they were male/female, or older/younger than you, or did they belong to a different nationality or religion or region, or any other thing you think is important about them?

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What else?

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Name

Today's date

Encounter title and/or number



Your feelings

Describe how you felt at the time by completing these sentences?

My feelings or emotions at the time were...

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.....

My thoughts at the time were...

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What I did at the time was...

(for example did you pretend you had not noticed something that was strange? Did you change the subject of the conversation which had become embarrassing? Did you ask questions about what you found strange?)...

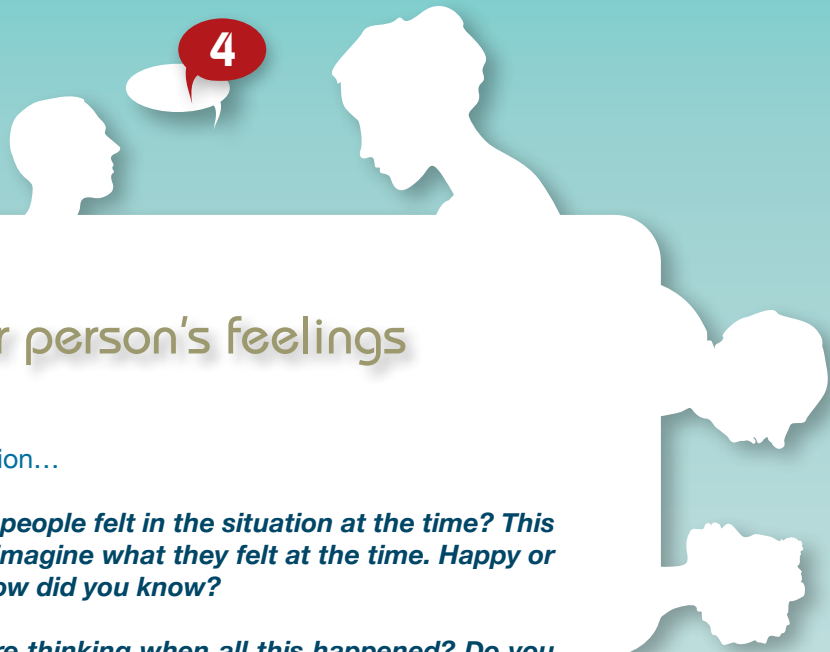
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What else?

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Name

Encounter title and/or number



The other person's feelings

Imagine yourself in their position...

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? This can be difficult but try and imagine what they felt at the time. Happy or upset/stressed, or what? How did you know?

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened? Do you think they found it strange, or interesting, or what?

Choose one or more of these or add your own and say why you have chosen it.

For them it was an everyday experience/an unusual experience/a surprising experience/a shocking experience/because...

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Choose one or more of the options below and complete the sentence or add your own ideas.

The other people involved in the experience appeared to have the following feelings - surprise/shock/delight/no special feelings/...

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The other person's feelings

4

I noticed this because of what they did/said and/or how they looked, for example they... (say what you noticed)

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I am not sure because they seemed to hide their feelings...

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What else?

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Name

Encounter title and/or number

Today's date

Name Today's date
Encounter title and/or number



Same and different

Thinking about the similarities and differences between the ways in which you thought and felt about the situation and the ways in which they thought and felt about it...

were you aware at the time of any similarities and, if so, what were they?

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were you aware at the time of any differences and, if so, what were they?

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Looking back at the situation...

are you aware now of any other similarities, and if so what are they?

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.....

are you aware now of any other differences, and if so what are they?

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.....

How do you see your own thoughts, feelings and actions now?

First thoughts

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.....

Choose one or more of the following and complete the sentence
OR invent your own.

- The way I acted in the experience was appropriate because what I did was...
- I think I could have acted differently by doing the following...
- I think the best reaction from me would have been...
- My reaction was good because...
- I hid my emotions by...

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What else?

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Name Today's date
Encounter title and/or number

Name
Today's date
Encounter title and/or number



Talking to each other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made adjustments in how you talked or wrote to them?

First thoughts

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.....

Further ideas – for example:

I was talking to them in my own language and I noticed I needed to make adjustments to help them understand me, for example...

I was not speaking in my own language and I had to make adjustments to make myself understood - to simplify / to explain using gestures, by explaining a word, by...

I noticed things about how they spoke – that they simplified, that they used gestures, that they spoke more slowly...

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Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better?

First thoughts

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Further ideas – for example:

I already knew things about how people communicate and behave in other groups which helped me to understand the experience and communicate better – I knew for example that...

I knew that other people involved in the experience thought and acted differently because of what they had learnt as children, for example...

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What else?

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Name Today's date
Encounter title and/or number

Name

Today's date

Encounter title and/or number



Finding out more

There may have been things in the experience which puzzled you and you tried to find out more at the time.

If you did so, how did you do it?

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.....

If you have found out an answer since, how did you do it?

For example:

There were things I did not understand, so I tried to find out by asking questions at the time/reading about it/looking on the internet/asking questions...

I used the following sources for information...

When finding new information I noticed the following similarities and differences with things I know from my own society...

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.....

The following things still puzzle me...

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.....

What else?

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Using comparisons to understand

People often compare things in other groups or cultures with similar things in their own.

Did you do this? Did it help you to understand what was happening?

For example:

The experience involved some things which were similar to what I know in my own group and these are the things I noticed...

There were some things which were different from my own group...

Dotted lines for writing.

What else?

Dotted lines for writing.

Name Today's date
Encounter title and/or number

Name

Today's date

Encounter title and/or number



Thinking back and looking forward

If, when you look back, you draw conclusions about the experience, what are they?

Complete as many of these as you can...

I liked the experience for the following reasons...

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I disliked the experience for the following reasons...

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There were some things which **I approve** of and these are my reasons...

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There were some things which **I disapprove** of and these are my reasons...

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Thinking back
and looking forward

9

Try to imagine that you are telling someone you know well about all this.
It could be your brother or sister for example.

Do you think they would have the same opinions as you? Would they approve and disapprove of the same things for the same reasons?

Try to think about why people you know well and who belong to the same group(s) as you (same family, same religion, same country, same region etc) might have the same reactions and write your explanation here:

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Did the experience change you? How?

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**Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience?
What did you do?**

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**Will you decide to do something as a result of doing this Autobiography?
If so what?**

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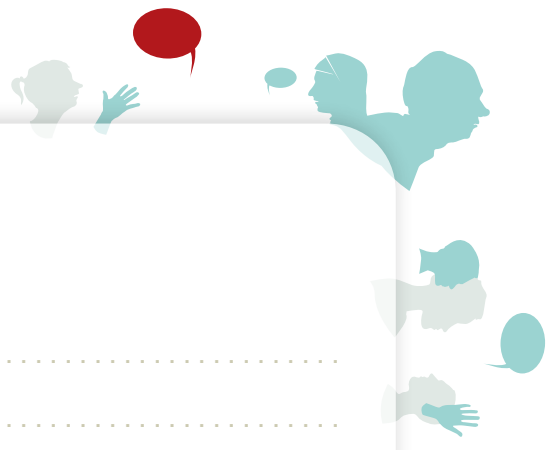
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What else?

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Name Today's date

Encounter title and/or number



What else? (your notes)

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, filling the majority of the page.