



Images of Others

An Autobiography
of Intercultural Encounters
through Visual Media

Introduction

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Education Department - Language Policy Unit



The **Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters** and **Images of Others – an Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media** are 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.”

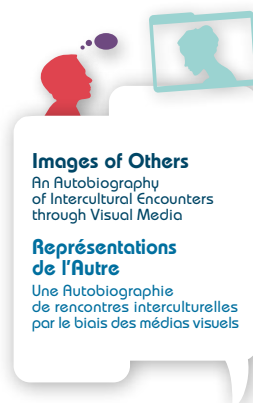
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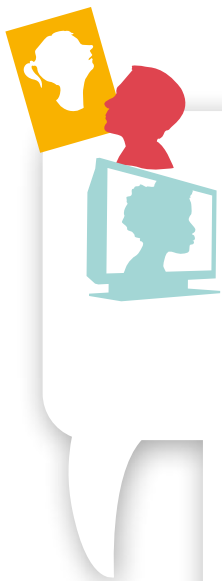
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www.coe.int/lang-autobiography



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An Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media

Preface

It has become commonplace to say that the world has changed, that globalisation and internationalisation make everything different, that intercultural experience is the experience of everyone. This is indeed true for many people who encounter people from other countries in their daily lives, for these are obviously 'intercultural' experiences. The freedom of movement in Europe has been a particular case in recent decades and the need for intercultural dialogue is well recognised.

On the other hand there are many parts of Europe and beyond where such experiences are, in fact, not so common, where people may feel that change has not affected their immediate surroundings even if they see the effects of globalisation and internationalisation in the daily news on television.

These two views are based on the idea that 'culture' is what is found in distant places, what might be experienced on a holiday in another country, for example, and that 'intercultural' applies only to experiences with people from distant places. 'Culture' is, however, a complex concept which is used – and sometimes over-used – to refer to many dimensions of our experience with other people. Indeed, 'other people' is also a deceptively simple term used to refer to those who are 'not like us'.

People who are 'not like us' and who have a different 'culture' may in fact be far more varied than just those

from other countries, whom we may or may not meet as a result of globalisation and internationalisation. Boys may say girls are 'not like us' and have their own 'culture', and vice versa. People who live in the city may say the same of those who live in the countryside, and vice versa. People of one religion/ethnicity/nationality, etc., may say it of those of another religion/ethnicity/nationality, etc., and vice versa.

One of the effects of globalisation and the development of technologies of various kinds is to bring people 'not like us' into our lives through visual media, through '24-hour news' on television and the Internet, through globally-orientated advertising, through the more traditional media of newspapers and magazines in their traditional and their internet formats, and also through the materials offered for all kinds of learning throughout life in formal and informal settings.

It soon becomes clear that intercultural encounters are part of our everyday lives with or without globalisation and internationalisation, sometimes on a face-to-face basis and often mediated in visual form. Some encounters go unnoticed because they are so common and seem natural. Others stick out as special and sometimes demanding and difficult experiences because they are unusual and are the cause of joy or fear or both. Even the ordinary becomes unusual as a particular event or image which strikes us among the many in our environment suddenly causes us to stop and wonder.

Joy and fear – and other emotions in between – are often best understood through a little reflection and analysis, and can then be a better basis for future intercultural encounters. Before this *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media* (AIEVM) was produced, the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE) was developed as a means of helping us to think about our face-to-face experiences of ‘other people’ with other ‘cultures’. This present AIEVM is based on the AIE but is substantially different because the ways in which our experience of others is affected by the visual media has to be taken into account. Like the AIE however, it is a means of helping us to decide how we can and should learn from an intercultural encounter, what we should do, what action we might take, how we can find out more about and benefit from the event which has been important to us, and how we can make it part of our understanding of ‘others’ and their ‘cultures’.

The AIEVM is essentially a series of questions about a particular image, often one which has been particularly striking and left an impression. The questions help us to reflect on the image, how we responded, how we thought and felt about it then and now, and what conclusions we can draw from it for the future. The questions follow a careful sequence which is based on scientific research but are written in a way which makes it easy for anyone to follow. In the ‘Standard’ version, those who use the AIEVM can do it alone or with others – with the help of a friend or teacher for example – whereas the version of the AIEVM for younger learners is intended for children who need help from an adult in reading and writing and in thinking about the image.

The AIEVM is accompanied by *Notes for Facilitators* in both versions, where a more detailed explanation of its purpose and origins is given. There is also a feedback form which will help the team which designed and produced the AIEVM to improve it in the future. Thirdly there is a text – *Context, Concepts and Theories* - which deals in some depth with the some of the concepts which underlie the AIEVM, such as what we mean by ‘culture’ and many other concepts which help to clarify a complex area for ‘facilitators’. Finally, there is a shorter and simplified version of this explanatory text, entitled *Concepts for Discussion*, which can be used with people who complete the Standard version of the AIEVM and who themselves might want to understand more about how disciplines such as psychology and sociology help us to analyse intercultural encounters in a scientific way.

It is hoped that the AIEVM will be a means of helping anyone who has had a significant intercultural experience of any kind to benefit from it, make it part of their way of seeing the world around them, and decide how to take a full part in the intercultural world to which they belong.



Images of Others

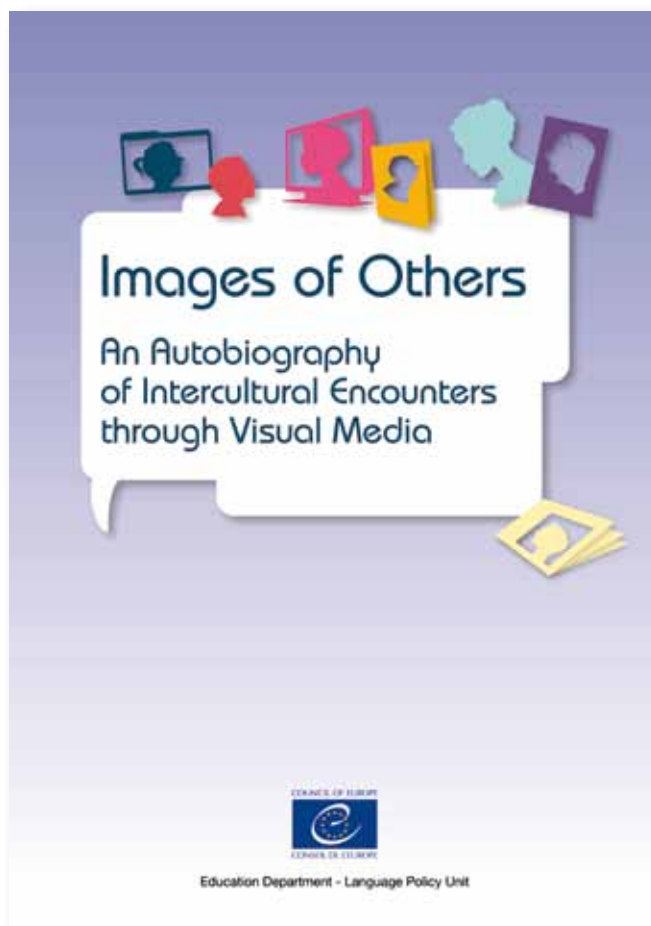
An Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media

Introducing the **Autobiography**

- A natural disaster in another country is front-page news with images of people suffering, or a major sporting event is reported on television with images of jubilant supporters.
- A new advertising campaign by an international company plays on images of people with a flamboyant lifestyle in an 'exotic' location.
- A video about other people with other religions 'goes viral' on the internet with images which are mysterious or raise anxiety.
- A textbook in a geography lesson or a foreign language lesson shows pictures of 'daily life' in another country.

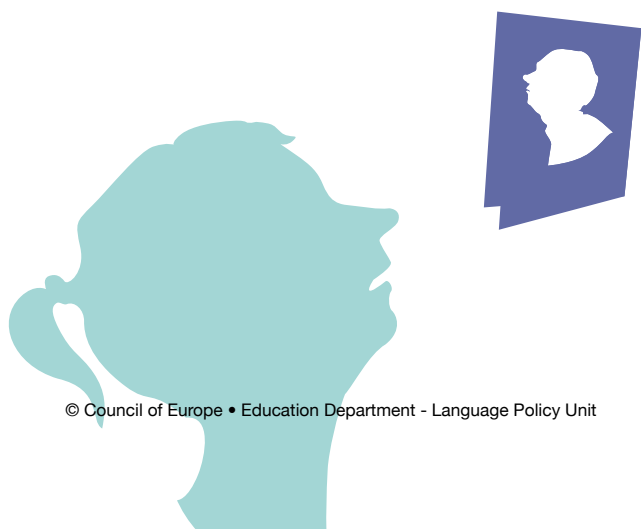
Such images and many more are part of the image-laden environment in which we live. They are the kind of image which the AIEVM will help people of all ages to react to in a more reflective way than the immediate impact might have – and is often intended to have by the people who produced them. Images are not neutral and our responses to them are not neutral either. Sometimes we realise that we are being manipulated or persuaded by images and those behind them. We often know this is the case for advertising but might be less aware of it in newspaper or textbook images.

The AIEVM has been produced at a time when we are increasingly aware of the impact of images on our understanding of the world around us and of our need to respond to them in a reasonable and balanced way. We need to acknowledge that we can learn much about the world – both that which is distant and that which is near us – from images, but also to be able to analyse how the images construct the world for us. We need to be able to think about the effects images have not only on what we think but also on what we do – how we respond to the suffering cause by natural disasters, to the national jubilation of sports events, to the persuasion of advertising, to the indirect impressions we are left with from an image we seems to be telling us a simple fact.



The AIEVM materials include:

- the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media*;
- the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media for younger learners*;
- *Facilitators' notes* for both versions;
- a concept paper setting out the contexts, concepts and theoretical background of the project;
- a 'cut down' version of the concept paper to use as a stimulus for discussion and debate with older students.





What is the Autobiography?

The Autobiography takes the form of a series of questions and prompts carefully designed to guide the learner's reflections on a chosen image of someone from another cultural group. It provides the learner with a structure to analyse the image and consider how they responded to the image, what intentions there might be in the image, what they learnt from the image and what action or activity they might undertake as a consequence.

Thinking about communication

In the image, do the person/people shown use language or gestures to communicate with people in the image or with viewers? If so, what language or gestures do they use?

If you were to actually meet the person/people shown in the image, what would you do or say?

Do you have any knowledge of their language and/or culture which could help you to understand and communicate with them? If so, what sort of things do you know?

What do you think you could do to make it easier for you to understand each other?

a) example of one of the questions from the standard version

Is it real?

For an image of a real person: **Do you think the picture shows the person as he/she really is?**

If not: **How is the picture different from real life?**

Do you think the picture exaggerates anything about this person or about the situation?

[PROMPTS: about the way the person looks; about the way the person behaves]

Do you think it is OK to exaggerate these things about this person? Why do you think this? Can you give me your reasons?

For an image of an imaginary person: **Does the person in the image seem like a real life person?**

If not: **How does the person seem different from a real life person?**

Do you think the picture exaggerates anything about this person?

Do you think it is OK to exaggerate these things about this person? Why do you think this? Can you give me your reasons?

Do you think other people who belong to the same country/place/group/religion as the person in the picture look and behave in the same way as the person in the image?

What might be the same?

What might be the differences?

b) example of questions from the young learner's version

How might the Autobiography be used?

The Facilitators' Notes give a number of suggestions as to how and when the Autobiography could be used.

The facilitator and the learners can decide whether it is to be used as:

- something for private use only, a self-reflection and self-assessment that is not viewed by others;
- something to be shared by learner and facilitator in confidence as part of a joint conversation and assessment of intercultural learning;
- a group exercise and focus for classroom discussion and collaborative learning.

When might the Autobiography be used?

There is also flexibility about the occasions on which the Autobiography might be used as shown in the following examples taken from the facilitator's notes.

Regular use: it could be used at regular intervals so that the growing collection of reflections serves as a record of developing intercultural awareness and skills, for example after the regular holidays that punctuate the young person's school career when each learner will have their own individual story to report.

After a weekend

After a weekend, when learners may have been to the cinema or been watching a lot of television programmes, the Autobiography can be used with learners to encourage them to reflect upon a specific image which they have seen in a film or a television programme over the weekend. In the case of younger learners, they may be interviewed individually either by their teacher or by a classroom assistant, while in the case of older learners, they may fill in a copy of the Autobiography by themselves.

Planned use: use of the Autobiography might be planned to coincide with a particular event being organised for the learners such as a school trip. In this case the learners could be writing individual accounts of a shared experience.

After a school visit to a museum or art gallery in which images of people from other cultures have been seen

If a school organises trips to museums or art galleries to see exhibitions in which there are images of people from other cultures, then the Autobiography can be used after the trip to encourage learners to reflect on the images which they have seen, and to consider whether any stereotypes were present in these images, and why the painter, photographer or video artist chose to depict the people in the way that they did.

Responsive use: it could be an unplanned response to a particular unexpected encounter or unforeseen incident (positive or negative) that nevertheless might have a significant impact on the learner's intercultural understanding.

At the time of a major news event

When a major news event takes place in another country, such as a national festival, a sporting competition, an earthquake or a flood, the Autobiography can be used as a tool for the analysis of learners' reactions to the way in which the people involved in the event have been depicted in television news broadcasts. This may be in a classroom and led by a teacher. Or it may be a private use encouraged by a teacher, perhaps for homework – with the options of keeping learners' analyses confidential or showing them to others.

The Model of Intercultural Competences

Both versions of the Autobiography are structured round a model of intercultural competences that includes these four elements:

- Knowledge and skills
- Behaviour
- Attitudes and feelings
- Action

Each of the questions relates to one of these elements as shown in the examples below. In the Autobiography the questions follow each other in a careful progression.

Having knowledge about the media: having knowledge of media production processes and the different sources of enunciation, of the different types of media discourse, of the audiences to which images are addressed, of the specific registers of expectation which audiences bring to different types of media discourse, and of how narrative context can influence the interpretation of images by audiences.

Example: *Is there anything about the person/people shown in the image that is exaggerated or emphasised? If so, what?*

Is there anything about the person/people that could have been shown that is missing from the image? If so, what?

Cognitive and behavioural flexibility: the ability to adjust, develop and adapt one's own skills and behaviour in response to the acquisition of new knowledge, and the ability to deploy these new skills and behaviours actively when further encounters with cultural others, or with images of cultural others, take place.

Example: *Has seeing the image changed your thinking in any way? How?*

Multiperspectivity and tolerance of ambiguity: accepting that, because people who belong to different cultures have different beliefs and different values, there can be multiple perspectives on and interpretations of any given situation.

Example: *Do you think the person/people shown in the image would be pleased with this image of themselves? Please give your reasons.*

Do you think they would have preferred to be shown differently? Please explain your answer.

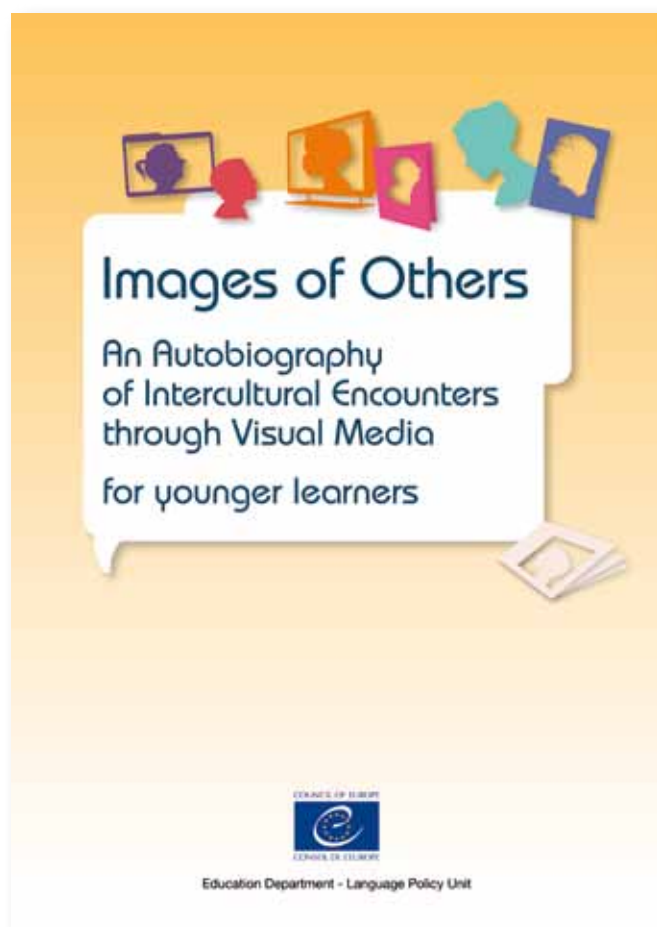
Action orientation: as a consequence of all the rest, the willingness to undertake action, either alone or with other people, with the aim of making a contribution to the common good.

Example: *Will you do something as a result of completing this Autobiography? If so, what will you do?*

The Younger Learners' Version

The younger learners' version of the AIEVM uses the same model of intercultural competences as the standard version, but explores the issues raised by encounter at a cognitive, linguistic and emotional level appropriate for young children.

It is intended to be used in an oral, interview-style format where the child talks to an adult about an image and the adult is able to keep a record of the child's thinking. The adult 'facilitator' may be, for example, a teacher but might also be a parent using the Autobiography at home.



What I notice

Whom do you see (or who is the main person you see) in this image?

What's the first thing you notice about him/her?

What else do you notice about him/her?

What is he/she doing?

The facilitator's guide suggests a number of different ways the younger learners' Autobiography might be used, and describes possible preparatory activities and suggestions from teachers who have used the material with their own classes. The preparatory activities help young learners become more aware of the nature of images in the environment.

Familiarisation with different forms of media

In preparation for the AIEVM, teachers may wish to familiarise their pupils with a variety of media (e.g., news media, advertising, entertainment) and their purposes. They could use a categorisation exercise to place examples of different media in the correct groupings and discuss their choices.

The choice of images may be left to children or the facilitator may decide to help in this. The *Facilitators' notes* suggest possible strategies for this and how the selection of images by a teacher could be related to work throughout the curriculum.

The selection of images

To support young learners in the early stages of the development of intercultural skills and competences, the teacher or facilitator could offer a selection of three to six suitable images from which each child selects one as the focus of the questions. The images may be linked to particular curriculum areas or school activities, for example a selection of pictures related to a geography or religious education topic, or paintings viewed during a class visit to an art gallery.

The Autobiography can also be used in other ways. Children can discuss their responses to an image in pairs or small groups or older children who are able to read the questions for themselves can also write their answers.

After a weekend

After a weekend, when learners may have been to the cinema or been watching a lot of television programmes, the Autobiography can be used with learners to encourage them to reflect upon a specific image which they have seen in a film or a television programme over the weekend.

Contexts and Concepts

The Autobiography can become not only an opportunity for personal reflection on a particular encounter, but also a stimulus for reflection, discussion and debate around key concepts that often shape our relations with others.

The Autobiography materials include a paper, 'Context, Concepts and Theories', in which international experts in a number of related fields have set out the historical and theoretical contexts of the Autobiography and explored key concepts including culture, nationality, citizenship, multicultural, intercultural, plurilingual, tolerance, respect and dialogue. This paper will be interesting background reading for facilitators and a useful resource for students in further and higher education.

2.11 Multiple Identities and the Impact of Intercultural Encounters

Individuals are simultaneously members of a large number of different social groups (such as national groups, racial groups, religious groups, gender groups, etc.). When membership of a particular social group comes to form a salient part of an individual's own self-concept, such that he or she attributes value and emotional significance to that membership, that person may be said to have acquired a subjective identification with that group. Usually, individuals subjectively identify with more than just a single social group. In addition, people frequently use their personal attributes (such as fun-loving, conscientious, conservative, tolerant, etc.) and their interpersonal relationships and social roles (such as mother, friend, son, employee, etc.) as further components of their self-concepts.

These multiple identifications with social groups, attributes, relationships and roles help individuals to orientate, position and define themselves in the social world relative to other people. The term 'identification' is used here (rather than 'identity') to help capture the notion that identifications are active psychological processes (rather than reified entities which individuals possess).

extract from *Context, concepts and theories*

In addition a 'cut down' version of the concepts has been produced for use in the classroom or seminar group with older students. This version provides short and clear definitions for ten of the key concepts and supplies a number of questions for each which encourage students to examine the concepts in detail and relate them to their own lives and the societies in which they live.

Below is an example of the way in which one of the concepts has been presented in order to stimulate discussion.

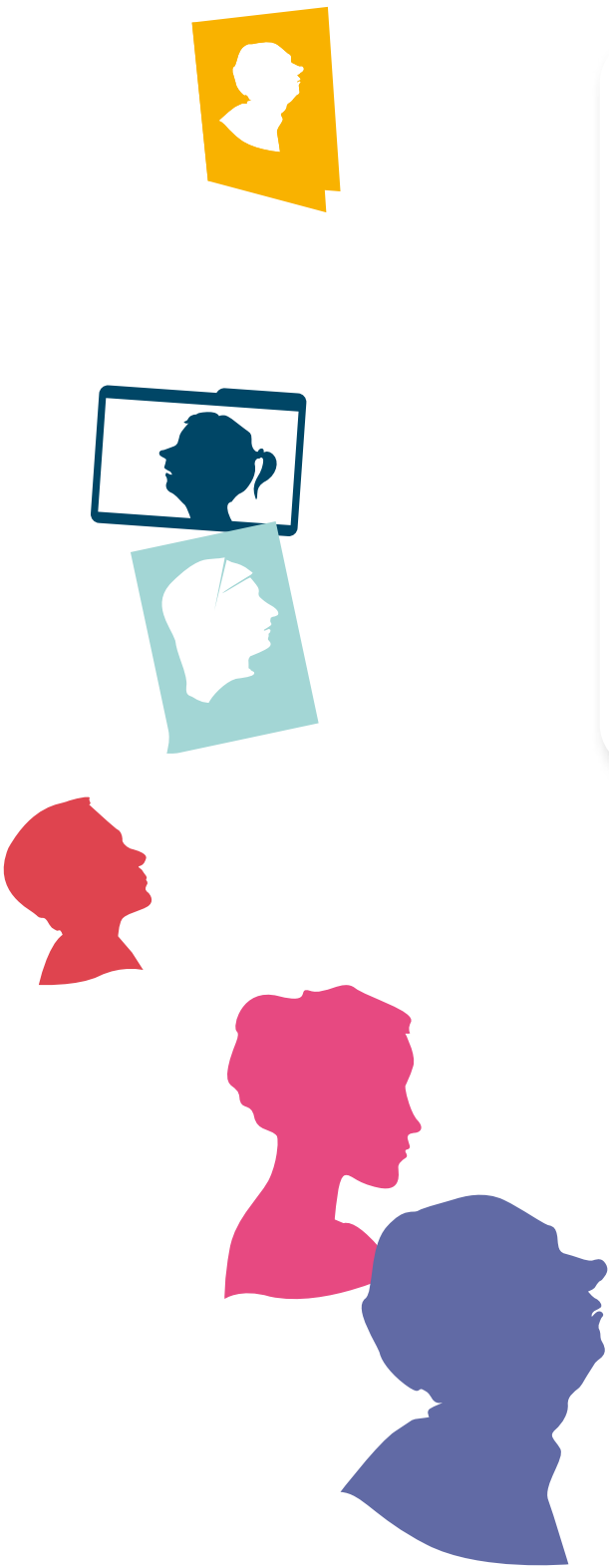
a) Culture

- Are there elements in your life that you (or others) might view as part of your culture? What are they? How did you acquire them?

The word 'culture' is associated with practices, beliefs, values, symbols and traditions, with particular ways of living and of understanding the world. Cultures can be understood as the fixed, inherited features of different national, ethnic and religious groups. This way of talking about culture as the distinct and essential features of a particular group is called 'dominant' discourse. Cultures can also be understood as dynamic and changing, continually being redefined by individuals and groups as they interact with others of different backgrounds or respond to changing circumstances. This way of talking about culture is known as 'demotic discourse'.

- What might the benefits and disadvantages be of having a strong sense of a fixed, inherited cultural identity?
- Can you think of any instances in your environment where interactions between different cultures are creating new cultural expressions?

extract from *Concept for discussion*



Developing the Autobiography

The Autobiography instruments and support materials have been designed collaboratively by an international team bringing different perspectives and areas of expertise to the project. The instruments have been piloted with school children and older students in a number of countries across Europe, and have been revised and developed by listening to what those young people and their teachers had to say. There is a *Feedback Form for facilitators* should you wish to share your own experiences of using the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media* and suggestions for the further development of the tool.



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**Représentations
de l'Autre**
Une Autobiographie
de rencontres interculturelles
par le biais des médias visuels

www.coe.int/lang-autobiography

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