

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 2

Activity 2: Sharing intercultural encounters

Below are some reflections on the young people's stories of intercultural encounter.

1. *The differences between the interviewees and the people they encounter*

Ben talks about the religious difference between him and his Muslim school friends.

Sarah reports racial differences between herself as a young black woman and the villagers she encountered in Austria.

Marcos and his sister found that they did not share the same idiomatic language and references to popular culture as their Greek classmates.

Shirleny notes how in close intercultural relationships the partners can experience the same things differently.

2. *What the interviewees say about the way other people perceive them*

Sarah found that the villagers viewed her in a totally different way from the way she normally viewed herself; they were most interested in her colour. She found that sometimes the villagers were just curious, but also that some appeared to be more negative.

Marcos found that his classmates saw him as different from themselves because he had been brought up in England.

3. *Their experience of being in an environment in which they stand out as different from most of the others*

Ben describes how he initially felt lonely and excluded when his Muslim school friends went to their after school Qur'an classes.

Sarah reported how the way the villagers looked at her made her uncomfortable. She recalls their curious glances and whispering.

4. *Their experience of being in a multicultural environment.*

Shirleny loves the experience of being in a multicultural environment as she feels she is learning every day.

Sarah appreciates the diversity of London; here she feels belonging together as Londoners and not racial and cultural difference is the important identity. In London, she finds difference is the norm.

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Ben finds that the diversity of London, where people are aware of their own cultures and maintain links with other parts of the world, makes him feel part of a world community.

5. *The strategies they use to respond to cultural difference*

As a child, **Marcos** adopted a strategy which he describes as a form of 'self-defence', against others' teasing. Instead of blaming his classmates he learnt to understand why they think of him as different, but at the same time he maintained a sense of himself as not different from them deep down.

Sarah describes how tolerating differences of opinion without questioning or disagreeing with them is one strategy for getting on with others in a culturally diverse context.

6. *How their self-perception is changed through intercultural encounter.*

Ben is inspired by his Muslim friends to find out more about his own culture and religion.

Sarah was not very conscious of being black until she met people who found it surprising and strange. This experience also made her reflect more on the Londoner identity she shares with people of a variety of cultures and races.

Being of dual heritage himself makes **Marcos** feel that cultural distinctions are not that important and people should 'just get along'.

Shirleny feels that encountering cultural difference and experiencing 'culture shock' encourages her to stop and think, to understand herself better and become a better person.