

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 2

Activity 3: Stories of encounter

A teacher exchange programme

I took part in a teacher exchange program in Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A. and lived together with 7 Indians and 1 American. I have never met Indians before. They cooked Indian food and it was so spicy that I couldn't eat it although I like Indian food. Then they cooked sweets and it was so sweet that I couldn't eat it. I ate at Starbucks and had some burgers. I spent much time at Indian parties where they sang Bollywood songs. I didn't understand anything.

On one side I was lost in translation and a bit confused, but on the other side I was very impressed how open-minded and interested these Indian students were. And they knew more about Germany than some Germans I met. They are very polite and friendly people. And they mean it honestly.

These students all studied engineering at the University of Minnesota and they appreciated their scholarship a lot. I have never met students like them before in Europe. On one side, they were really open-minded and on the other side some of them were very traditional concerning arranged marriage etc. How can an educated woman find arranged marriages okay??? They were strongly connected to their Indian roots and they lived in a kind of subculture in the U.S.A. I really appreciated being a part of it for a certain amount of time. Among my friends, there is not such a big sense of belonging together and meeting in big groups. We are more individualists. Is individualism something good or bad? I guess it would be different if we all would live in a very different country in Asia for example.

I asked many questions and I got many answers. Very interesting. The other teachers, who took part in this exchange programme always asked me about what happened last night because I always had stories to tell: the festival of light where I wore a sari, the Indian parties etc.

I was confused about their way of living and realised that I am used to more luxury than they are. I learned to appreciate more what I have and I observed the way they behaved. I accepted the way they live because I realised that I also have some things that I need (coffee, German breakfast, sports).