



Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters for younger learners



Notes for facilitators



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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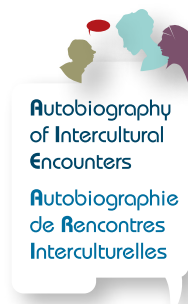
For further acknowledgements, please see the *Introduction*.

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for younger learners

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What is the **Autobiography**?

The Autobiography has been designed to help children analyse a specific intercultural encounter which they themselves have experienced, by answering a sequence of questions about various aspects of that encounter.

An intercultural encounter is an experience in which individuals from different cultural backgrounds meet. The experience which a child talks about could be one where he or she met a person from a different country, a person from a different region within the same country, or a person who speaks a different language from themselves. Or it could be an experience in which the child met someone from a different ethnic group or someone with a different religion from their own.

The intercultural experience which some children choose to talk about might be a relatively profound one which led to an awakening of their awareness of cultural difference. Some of the more complex questions in the Autobiography have been designed with this possibility in mind. However, other learners may choose a much more mundane experience (such as buying a loaf of bread in a shop in a foreign country, or an occasion on which a foreigner asked them for directions in the street). With the latter type of experience, some questions in the

Autobiography may be redundant and should simply be omitted if they are not relevant.

There are two versions of the Autobiography:

- ***The present version for younger learners***, where the language has been simplified and some of the more complex issues have been omitted;
- ***The standard version***, which is intended for use by older learners.

The decision about which one to offer to learners is a matter of teachers' judgement of their learners.

There are two related purposes for the Autobiography:

- **Self-evaluation**: it guides learners to evaluate their own responses to a specific encounter; if used repeatedly over time, they can look back at different encounters and how they evaluated them and thus learn about themselves;
- **Teaching and learning**: teachers can use the Autobiography as a means of stimulating reflection and analysis, and can thus facilitate learning in deliberate ways.

How to use the Autobiography



There are no fixed rules about how the Autobiography should be used. It can be used formally in the classroom and also informally at a time and place of the learner's own choice.

It can be used as a teaching instrument working with groups or individuals, led by a teacher – the teaching and learning option. With older children, it can also be used privately as a kind of diary which may remain confidential – the self-evaluation option.

It can also be used by the teacher, a classroom assistant or another responsible adult to interview children individually about a specific intercultural encounter which they have experienced – again, as a teaching and learning option.

The use will depend on one or more factors:

- Whether and how the Autobiography is being incorporated into a course of study;
- The wishes of the learner about confidentiality;
- The age of the learners and whether they need an adult's help to understand the phrasing and concepts of the Autobiography;
- The literacy level of the learners – whether they are able to write their answers for themselves or whether it is more appropriate for them to give their answers in an interview with an adult, either one-to-one or in groups.

Young learners may use the Autobiography differently over time. They may initially share their responses to the current Autobiography in an interview with an adult, use the response sheets provided with the younger learners' version as they develop their reading and writing skills, and eventually progress to the standard version as they grow in maturity.

The Autobiography can be used in a flexible way!

It is important to note that the Autobiography can be adapted and used in whatever way is judged to be the most helpful and appropriate for the learners who are going to use it.

For example:

- It is not always necessary to ask all of the questions and suggestions which have been included in the Autobiography – only those questions and suggestions which are helpful or relevant to the particular encounter which is being discussed need be asked;
- In addition, the precise wording of individual questions can be varied and adapted in order to make the questions sound natural in the language which is being used;
- The style of the questions can also be adjusted to make them sound closer to the spontaneous language of the child who is being interviewed;
- Additional follow-up questions can also be asked if they are appropriate for the particular encounter which is being discussed.

The most important feature of the Autobiography is the sequencing of the section headings and of the main questions within each section, rather than the precise wording of any individual questions.

Here are some possible scenarios where the Autobiography might be used:

After a school holiday

After a school holiday, when learners may have been away from home – perhaps to another country or to another region of their own country or at a school camp – the Autobiography can be used with primary/elementary school learners to encourage them to reflect upon a specific experience which they have had while on holiday. In the case of such learners, they may be interviewed individually either by their teacher or by a classroom assistant.

After a school trip

Schools often organise visits to other regions of the same country or to other countries. Often they prepare the learners for this very carefully but it is just as important to facilitate their reflections after the event. Each learner in a group will have had some particular experience or encounter even though they have all been on the same trip, and the Autobiography can help to individualise the follow-up and reflection. After each individual has completed the Autobiography, they may be willing to share their encounter with others in the group and, with the help of a teacher, think about the variety of experience rather than over-generalise their individual experience.

After a major event

After a major event such as learners witnessing an exchange of racial abuse, the Autobiography can be used as a tool for analysis of learners' reactions. This may be in a classroom and led by a teacher. It may be a private use encouraged by a teacher – with the option of keeping it confidential or showing it to others.

After an encounter with another cultural group

There may be occasions (such as a school visit to a place of worship, or a shared activity between schools in a twinning arrangement) where the intercultural meeting was between groups rather than individuals. In such a situation, a group discussion involving the entire class might be a useful forum for talking about the experience and for articulating and sharing ideas.

Or any other scenarios of intercultural encounters...





In the case of younger learners, an adult (either a teacher or a classroom assistant) can use the present version of the Autobiography to interview the child individually on a one-to-one basis. The person interviewing the child could take notes on what the child says during the interview, or could tape-record the interview for transcription later. When the Autobiography is used in this way, it is recommended that:

- The interview should not be hurried
- Silences and long pauses in the child's reporting should be tolerated to give the child time to think about the encounter which is being described;
- Questions should be omitted if the information has already been given or if the question is irrelevant to the encounter;
- Questions may be paraphrased as appropriate for the encounter;
- The interviewer should follow up anything of interest which the child reports;
- The flash cards which are provided with the younger learners' version of the Autobiography (displaying the words that describe the successive sections of the Autobiography) may be used to structure the conversation into its various parts for the child;
- The pictures which are provided with the younger learners' version of the Autobiography may be used together with the introductory text for explaining the idea of an intercultural encounter to the child, if it is judged that this would be useful for helping the child understand what is required in the Autobiography;
- Alternatively, the facilitator may use other pictures not provided with the Autobiography to explain the idea of an intercultural encounter and to stimulate discussion with younger learners about these encounters.

Some of the questions in the Autobiography may be difficult for young children to answer. This is particularly the case with the questions which ask children to talk about their own feelings and about the thoughts and feelings of the person or people they have met. The interviewer should not worry if a child, even with the suggested prompting, finds it difficult to articulate responses to these questions. The challenge presented by these questions is intended to encourage the development of the child's thinking.

In addition to one-to-one interviewing, the younger learners' version of the Autobiography can be used in a variety of other ways. For example:

- Children could discuss their answers to the various questions with each other in pairs;
- The Autobiography could be used collectively with the whole class in a group discussion;
- If children find it difficult to express their feelings using language, they could be given additional materials (such as drawings, coloured pencils or puppets) to help them express the way that either they or the other people felt during the encounter;
- Children who have acquired the necessary reading and writing skills could complete the Autobiography on their own, using the response sheets which are provided with the younger learners' version.

Teachers should feel free to use the Autobiography in whichever way they feel works best.



What is the rationale behind the Autobiography?

There are three ideas behind the Autobiography:

- That a special or 'rare' event in someone's life, can have a lasting effect on them;
- That a tool for helping people to think about their experiences, especially 'rare events', can make them more meaningful;
- That changes are not always 'incremental' and people sometimes become more intercultural and sometimes less as a result of their experiences.

The make-up of the Autobiography, the particular questions and the order in which they are put, is derived from a definition or model of intercultural competence, with a number of identifiable elements. Users of the Autobiography are encouraged to think about their intercultural competence in relation to these elements, but without any reference to the technical terms.

Teachers however will be able to help learners if they know what lies behind the questions and what the elements are. They are summarised here, and in the Theoretical Indicators that follow these Notes (page 10), the Autobiography is presented with the links from each question to the elements made clear.

A model of intercultural competence

Attitudes and feelings

- Acknowledging the identities of others: noticing how others have different identities and accepting their values and insights.
- Respecting otherness: showing curiosity about others and being willing to question what is usually taken for granted and viewed as 'normal'.
- Having empathy: being able to take someone else's perspective, to imagine their thoughts and feelings.
- Identifying positive and negative emotions and relating them to attitudes and knowledge.
- Tolerance for 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.

Behaviour

- Being flexible: adapting one's behaviour to new situations and to what other people expect.
- Being sensitive to ways of communicating: recognising different ways of speaking and other forms of communication that exist in other languages or other ways of using the same language.

Knowledge and skills

- Having knowledge about other people: knowing facts about people whom one meets, and knowing how and why they are what they are.
- Discovering knowledge: using certain skills to find out about people one meets, by asking questions, seeking out information, and using these skills in real-time encounters.
- Interpreting and relating: understanding people or places or things by comparing them to familiar people, places, things in one's own environment, seeing similarities and differences.
- Being critical: noticing how other people think and act and distancing oneself from one's own ways of thinking and acting, and being able to explain one's judgements about both.
- Becoming aware of one's own assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices.

Action

- Taking action: as a consequence of all the rest, being willing and able to become involved with other people in making things different and better.

What are the ethical issues?

The Autobiography follows the ideas in this model by encouraging learners to think about their attitudes, behaviour, knowledge/skills and the action they could take. In some circumstances (see possible scenarios in 'How to use the Autobiography') teachers may wish to use the questions to stimulate learners to think more deeply and critically about their experiences. They may, in particular, wish to stimulate learners to become involved with others in making changes in themselves and their environment.

Ethical issues may arise when the Autobiography is used, especially if the student expresses negativity or hostility towards the 'other' in the encounter. Extreme negativity will need to be followed up at a later time. However, milder negative reactions may eventually assist the child to learn through the use of the Autobiography to welcome intercultural differences (or at least to accept them).



Who can use the Autobiography?

The Autobiography can be used in a number of ways, with or without the help of a teacher. Here are some possibilities:

- A school as a whole decides to offer the Autobiography to learners and all teachers may help and encourage learners to use it, for example, after a class excursion with a geography or history teacher, or during/after a trip with a languages teacher;
- One particular teacher – the learners' 'class teacher' or 'tutor' – helps and encourages a class to use the Autobiography;

A detailed treatment of the ethical issues which could arise is beyond the scope of these notes. However, it may be useful for facilitators to be aware of the following resources for dealing with racism and intolerance towards others which are available from the Council of Europe:

Young People Facing Difference. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1995.

All Different, All Equal: Education Pack - Ideas, Resources, Methods and Activities for Informal Intercultural Education with Young People and Adults. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2005.

Domino: A Manual to Use Peer Group Education as a Means to Fight Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-semitism and Intolerance (2nd edition). Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2005.

Compass: A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People (3rd edition). Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2007.

Companion: A Campaign Guide about Education and Learning for Change in Diversity, Human Rights and Participation. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2007.

COMPASITO: Manual on Human Rights Education for Children. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2008.

Living in Democracy, EDC/HRE Volume III, Council of Europe Publishing, 2008.

- Older learners are left to use the Autobiography whenever they wish, perhaps with help and encouragement from parents (who will need some explanation such as these Notes for Facilitators);
- A group of teachers (for example, teachers of the language of schooling taught as a subject, foreign languages, citizenship education, history or geography) co-ordinate to use the Autobiography for the exploitation of cross-curricular themes.



What are the **responsibilities** of teachers and other facilitators?

When it is completed by a learner working on their own, the Autobiography is the property of the learner and can be a very private document. This creates some special conditions for teachers who might wish to consider the following options:

- Teachers only encourage older learners to use the Autobiography as a private diary – they do not see the Autobiography, unless invited by learners, and they do not oblige learners to use it;
- Teachers act as ‘mentors’, reading and discussing the Autobiography with individuals (and the record in this case need not be written – it could be an audio-recording which the learner keeps);

- Teachers encourage pairs of older learners to act as ‘mentors’ for each other;

- The Autobiography is completed by a whole class of learners in connection with a specific event (such as a class excursion) OR it is completed only when the learner wishes.

In all of these, and many other, circumstances, it is important to assure confidentiality if learners wish. If teachers intend that learners should share their experiences and what they write in their Autobiography, then learners need to be told this in advance.

Action

The questions which ask learners about actions they have taken or might take as a consequence of the intercultural experience are particularly important. Teachers and other facilitators need to consider if and how they actively encourage learners to engage in some activity. There are further ethical issues here, about whether teachers should take this responsibility or not.

The decision will be for each teacher/facilitator, or group of these, or may be an institutional policy as a whole. The decision will vary from teacher to teacher, from institution to institution and from one education system to another, depending on the traditions and responsibilities which teachers and others usually take.

It is recommended that teachers complete the standard version of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters themselves before using the version for Younger Learners with their class.





Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

for younger learners

Theoretical indicators

Can you remember a time when you met someone who was different from yourself in some way? This could be someone from another country, or someone from another place in... [the child's country].

Or it could be someone who has a different religion from you, or someone who speaks a different language. Think carefully about the meeting, where you met and what happened.

OK, have you thought of a time when you met someone who was different from yourself?

...



Display text card: The meeting

Description of the encounter

I'm really interested in hearing all about what happened when you met this person / these people. Tell me everything that happened.

If the child only gives a short answer or gets stuck, encourage her/him by using one or more of the following prompts:

What else can you tell me?

Tell me a little bit more.

And then what happened?

Location of the encounter

Where did this happen?

What were you doing there?

Display text card: The other person

Description of the other person

[THEORY - acknowledgement of identities, having knowledge about others]

Can you tell me more about... [the other person/people]? Who were they?

What was the first thing you noticed about them?

What else did you notice about them?

Can you tell me anything else about them?

What was her name? / What was his name? / What were their names?

What did they look like?

[THEORY - possible identity marker]

What clothes were they wearing?

[THEORY - possible identity marker]

Were they wearing anything else like jewellery?

[THEORY - possible identity marker]

If yes: *What sort of things?*

Have you seen other people like her / him / them before?

If yes: *Where?*

If yes: *In what ways were they like her / him / them?*



Display text card:

Talking to each other

Communicative aspects of the encounter

[THEORY - communicative awareness, knowledge]

How did they talk to you?

Was it easy for you to understand them?

If yes: **How come?**

If no: **Why not?**

How did you talk to them?

Was it easy for them to understand you?

If yes: **How come?**

If no: **Why not?**

Did you have to change the way you usually talk?

[THEORY - behavioural flexibility]

If yes: **How did you change the way you talk?**

Did you find any other way, like signing to them with your hands, to help them understand you?

If yes: **What did you do?**

Did they do any signing to you with their hands, to help you understand them?

If yes: **What did they do?**

Display text card:

Your feelings

The child's own reactions

[THEORY – respect for otherness]

What did you think when all this happened?

Prompt if necessary: **Did you find it strange, or interesting, or what?**

Why? / What makes you say that?



How did you feel at the time?

Prompt if necessary: **Did you enjoy it, or feel at all upset, or what?**

Why?/What makes you say that?

How did you feel about... [the other person/people]?

Prompt if necessary: **Did you like them, or not like them, or what?**

Why?/What makes you say that?

Would you like to see... [the other person/people] again?

If yes: **Why would you like to see them again?**

If no: **Why wouldn't you like to see them again?**

Display text card:

The other person's feelings

The child's perceptions of the other person's reactions

[THEORY – respect for otherness, empathy]

How do you think... [the other person/people] felt at the time?

Prompt if necessary: **Do you think she/he/they felt happy, or at all upset, or what?**

Why?/What makes you say that?

What do you think they were thinking when all this happened?

Prompt if necessary: **Do you think they found it strange, or interesting, or what?**

Why?/What makes you say that?

What do you think they felt about you?

Prompt if necessary: **Do you think they liked you, or didn't like you, or what?**

Why?/What makes you say that?

Do you think they would ever like to see you again?

Why?/Why not?



Display text card: Same and different

Comparing perspectives of self and other

[THEORY – respect for otherness, empathy, interpreting and relating, tolerance of ambiguity]

[Omit question if answer is obvious from preceding questions] **Do you think that you and... [the other person/people] felt the same way when you met?**

Why? / What makes you say that?

[Omit question if answer is obvious from preceding questions] **Do you think that you and... [the other person/people] felt differently about anything when you met?**

Why? / What makes you say that?

Do you think there is anything that you could learn from them?

If yes: **What sort of things?**

Prompt if necessary: **What about the way they speak, the way they dress, or something else about themselves?**

Do you think there is anything that they could learn from you?

If yes: **What sort of things?**

Prompt if necessary: **What about the way you speak, the things you do, or something else about yourself?**

Display text card: Thinking a bit more

Reflecting on the experience of the meeting as a whole

[THEORY - critical cultural awareness]

If you had to tell a friend about your meeting with... [the other person/people], what would you say?

What do you think you have learnt or discovered from meeting... [the other person/people]?

[THEORY - awareness of knowledge discovery]

If you met them again, and you had to spend an afternoon together, what sort of things do you think you would do together?



[THEORY - action orientation]

If you met them again, is there anything that you would like to tell them about yourself?

[THEORY - action orientation]

If you met them again, would you do anything different from last time?

[THEORY - behavioural flexibility, action orientation]

If yes: *What sort of things would you do differently?*

If no: *Why wouldn't you do anything differently?*

If you met them again, is there anything you would like to ask them?

[THEORY - knowledge discovery, action orientation]

If yes: *What sort of things would you like to ask them?*

If you wanted to find out more about them in the meantime, what would you do?

[THEORY - knowledge discovery, action orientation]

If they say they would ask someone for information: *Who would you ask? What sort of questions would you ask?*

Do you think meeting... [the other person/people] has changed you in any way?

If yes: *How has it changed you?*

If no: *Are you sure?*

Do you think meeting... [the other person/people] has made you do anything which you wouldn't have done if you hadn't met them?

[THEORY - action orientation]

If yes: *What did it make you do?*

If no: *Are you sure?*

Do you think you will do anything as a result of you and me having this talk?

[THEORY - action orientation]



Written version

Some older children may wish or prefer to write about their intercultural experience. In this case the following list of questions may be used. It is important to remind the children that they do not have to answer every question.

Name:

.....

Title:

Encounter with

What can you remember about the place where you met this person and what happened when you met?

Write down everything you can remember about the person you met, what they looked like and what they were wearing.

Was it easy for you and the other person to understand each other? How did you communicate with each other?

How did you feel about meeting this other person at the time?

How do you think the other person felt about meeting with you?

Do you think there is anything you and the other person could learn from each other?

What do you think you learnt or discovered from the meeting?

If you met the person again is there anything more you would like to ask them or anything else you would tell them about yourself?

Feedback form for facilitators

The team that developed the AIE would be very interested to receive feedback from facilitators. If you have any information or comments to offer about your experience of using the AIE, please use the form available on the website to send these to the team.

When you have completed this form electronically, it should be sent as an email attachment to the following address:

AIEfeedback@coe.int