Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

Context, concepts and theories

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."

The Council of Europe is a political intergovernmental organisation founded in 1949 with its permanent headquarters in Strasbourg, France. Its mission is to guarantee democracy, human rights and justice in Europe. Today it serves 800 million people in 47 states. The Council of Europe aims to build a greater Europe based on shared values, including tolerance and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

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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.

Autobiography
of Intercultural
Encounters

Autobiographie
de Rencontres
Interculturelles

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1 The **policy context** of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

That education policy is an integral element of social policy scarcely needs to be demonstrated. It has become so in the last few decades for various reasons, not least its contribution to social inclusion. It is also self-evident that education policy is central to economic policy, as the value of human capital in post-industrial societies has been recognised and the expectation that education systems can enhance human capital to make societies more competitive has become widespread.

These views have been expressed at state level in many parts of the world and at supranational level in the European Union and the Council of Europe, although by its very nature, the Council of Europe pays more attention to social than to economic policy, not least in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity" (2008)[1].

A particular focus in the White Paper is on social cohesion through interculturality. Social cohesion is defined as follows:

> Social cohesion, as understood by the Council of Europe, denotes the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means. (Section 1.4, para. 24)

The role of intercultural dialogue is considered fundamental in creating and maintaining social cohesion, and intercultural competence is the practical foundation:

> The learning and teaching of intercultural competence is essential for democratic culture and social cohesion. (Section 5.3, para. 151)

[1] *www.coe.int/dialogue*

The need to promote social cohesion within a society is not a new concern and has been one of the purposes of compulsory education since its inception. However, the increasing frequency of migration and mobility – a phenomenon which divides industrial, and post-industrial, societies irreversibly from agrarian societies – has created new minority social groups within states which hitherto considered themselves, with only some justification, to be homogeneous. Such new social groups are often vulnerable because lacking social status, and the Council of Europe is particularly concerned to ensure the social inclusion of vulnerable groups of all kinds and, in particular, migrant or immigrant groups.

The dynamics of free, globalised market economies have provided modernising societies with permanent growth in productivity and economic output, and competition produces winners and losers. Increase in wealth tends to be associated with an increase in inequality of distribution and opportunities. These disparities have a human rights dimension; if they are not corrected, they may develop the potential to disrupt a community. As a market economy is incapable of providing such correctives, it is a permanent political issue to do so. The loss of social cohesion is too high a price to pay for increasing unequally distributed affluence and welfare.

Social inclusion can take many forms in terms of rights, duties and activities in a community. The White Paper argues that there are five policy approaches to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and one of these is the acquisition of intercultural competence through planned teaching and learning. Key competence areas are 'democratic citizenship, language and history'. Education about religious and convictional diversity in an intercultural context is seen as contributing to education for democratic citizenship, although education about religions would be dealt with under different subject headings in different states. Similarly, interreligious dialogue is recognised as an important dimension of intercultural dialogue. The Council of Europe has pursued the improvement of teaching and learning in the three areas of democratic citizenship, language and history and in education about religions in numerous projects over many years.

The Education for Democratic Citizenship documents provide a description of the competences a democratic citizen needs to acquire in order to be active in the community, but since the European community is multilingual and multicultural, the competences of citizenship need to be complemented by linguistic and intercultural competences, and the label 'intercultural citizenship' has been devised to recognise this extra dimension.

In brief, an intercultural citizen is one who, first, has the competences of active citizenship needed in a community – whether local, regional or national – where there is a shared language and shared meanings, and who, second, also has the attitudes, knowledge and skills of intercultural competence which enable them to participate in multilingual and multicultural communities. Such communities exist within states, and increasingly so due to mobility and migration. They also exist when citizens of different states participate together in any form of joint activity.

The Council of Europe's Warsaw Declaration of 2005 – entitled 'Building a more humane and inclusive Europe' [2] – anticipated the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and lists some examples of joint activity which will promote social cohesion:

- promote co-operation and networking in the field of education and student exchanges at all levels;

- promote relevant intercultural programmes and exchanges at secondary school level, both within Europe and with neighbouring countries;

- develop (the Council of Europe's) network of schools of political studies with a view to promoting European core values among the new generations;

- empower young people to actively participate in democratic processes so that they can contribute to the promotion of core values.

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters can be used in any of these initiatives to help participants analyse and reflect on their participation in exchanges of any kind.

The White Paper in turn:

encourages multidisciplinary approaches and combines the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes – particularly the capacity for reflection and the self-critical disposition necessary for life in culturally diverse societies (Section 4.3.1, para. 94).

The inclusion of a reflection on personal development through the experience and, secondly, on the values, beliefs and behaviours of all involved, is a crucial element of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. Together with encouragement to be active citizens in a multilingual and multicultural world, this makes the Autobiography a valuable potential instrument in the implementation of some aspects of the White Paper and in the development of the competences and identities of intercultural citizens.

[2] *www.coe.int/Summit*

2 Concepts and theories
underlying the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

It is therefore intended that the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters will contribute to the development of intercultural competence and will facilitate the emergence of intercultural citizenship amongst those who use it. This section discusses some of the key concepts which underlie these notions of intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship.

2.1 Culture

The term 'culture', which is fundamental to the present discussion, is a complex term which has many different meanings and theoretical inter-pretations. A historical perspective provides a useful starting point for its exploration.

History and culture

There is an intrinsic link between culture and history. This is because, in both theory and practice, in any society, culture implies a reference to the past.

Every society is the product of constant development that bears the imprint of events from the distant or more recent past. History seeks to reconstruct this past in order to obtain knowledge and learn from it in a way that may be useful for the present day. The approach pursued may, however, have varying objectives and requirements, which affect the messages put across.

For a long time, people qualified to teach history and/or do historical research adopted positivist approaches and claimed to deliver indisputable 'historical truths'. Most of them now admit that these tend to be interpretations, which it may be necessary to challenge in the light of more careful study of the available archives or the discovery of new ones. We can therefore talk of 'historical knowledge' in the sense of knowledge acquired by means of clearly defined methods and based on tangible evidence. There are invariably, however, several possible ways of assessing

a situation. This is what necessitates multiple outlooks and '*multiperspectivity*' in the study of history, that is, the ability and willingness to take others' perspectives on situations, events, personalities and cultures into account in addition to one's own.

However, other accounts of the past are also available. They refer, with fewer precautions, to events or times past which may be more or less familiar. This is the 'historical literature', which ranges from biographies, sometimes reliably documented, of famous or lesser-known people to essays, substantial or otherwise, on a historical figure or period. The boom in communication has given these works a large audience. They certainly breed a familiarity with the past that did not exist previously, but this may have serious drawbacks. The version of the past that is offered up is more of an imposed reconstruction than one in which it is necessary to be actively involved. Priority is given to what is spectacular, while less striking but sometimes more important aspects are overlooked.

The progress of communication has also increased the number of messages of a third kind: those put across by people in positions of responsibility in society – those who govern us, political party leaders and spokespersons for socio-economic, intellectual or artistic circles. In most cases, reference is made to the history of a society in order to share views on developments to be proposed or averted, the idea being to make the most desirable choices while preserving traditions handed down from the past. Such approaches sometimes falsify history and generate illusions or breed intransigence, the virulence of which is illustrated by nationalism in its various forms. Yet the same rhetoric has a very different impact depending on whether it dates from the fairly distant past or the age of the information society. In the former case, it has generally not been widely publicised and has been turned into archives that await historians. In the latter case, however, the new means of communication make it accessible to countless consumers of information, who are free to turn it into an immediate history that is to their liking, with all the attendant distortions.

Culture as heritage and as memory

Culture can be seen as preserving a heritage handed down by predecessors. Traditions draw their strength from the past as a whole, to which they refer explicitly or implicitly, especially when they are particularly rigid and unshakeable. This is also apparent from folklore, in its various forms, in both traditional and modern societies. Theorists and enthusiasts alike consider it to be a manifestation of the memory of the ancient roots of a culture, and it is this culture that gives folklore its originality and authenticity.

Crises in history further highlight its impact on culture, which, in such circumstances, may just as easily help to safeguard aspects of the past that are assumed to be in danger of disappearing as undergo very important transformations as a result of events. It is unusual for a revolution like the 1789 Revolution in France or the 1917 Revolution in Russia to lead to the existing culture being replaced by a radically new culture. Vestiges of the past are always discernible in lifestyle habits and ways of thinking, bearing witness to an underlying continuity. As for the radical changes triggered by events, they are of course proof of the unfailing relationship between culture and history, whether in terms of the renewal of culture or its endangerment.

Culture as a product and proud achievement of history

The development of centres of power that wielded great political authority and had substantial resources at their disposal led to the advent of cultures that were seen as a symbol and proud achievement of history. The monuments erected, works of art, literature and music celebrate a grandiose event or time in the history of part of the world or even the world as a whole. The major centres of Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture already served this purpose. The same is true of the grand ventures launched by the kingdoms of the Renaissance or classical times, but also of the Gothic cathedrals built by the Christians, mosques in Islamic countries and the great Buddhist temples in Asia.

Dominant and dominated cultures

In these contexts, imbalances of power and resources are inevitable and are reflected in inequalities in the extent to which cultures are disseminated and in their influence and prestige. One striking example is the effect of the language of a culture. If it is a very widely-used language, that culture is assured of an audience and of much greater prestige than if the language is a less widely-spoken one. This is clearly apparent in today's world in the discrepancy between the familiarity that exists with English-language cultures and knowledge of other cultures. The existence of dominant and dominated cultures therefore seems

inherent to each historical development, with the former overshadowing the cultures and history of other peoples. These imbalances generate persistent conflict between cultures that claim to be universal and cultures that are highly specific, and between cultures that are credited with the ability to rise to the major challenges facing the human race and those that focus on their own concerns.

The clash of cultures as embodiments of heritage

Each culture is therefore prompted to assert itself as the embodiment of a heritage. The clashes stemming from political or economic interests are thus compounded by those caused by rivalry between cultures. During the First World War, each group of warring states claimed to be defending its culture or civilisation against the barbarity of the other. The Second World War, although more concerned with the clash between democracy and totalitarianism, or between respect for human rights and their denial, can be similarly interpreted. A culture that enjoys overwhelming supremacy and could well consider itself devoid of enemies to fear is nevertheless keen to assert itself in order to guard against hypothetical threats. Even in such circumstances, therefore, it feels possessive about a heritage that must be protected, if necessary by crushing others.

The only solution would be for every culture to stop being considered as the property of a particular group and to be seen as a contribution from the group to a general effort to identify and clarify the major challenges facing humankind. This process has very recently been set in motion in the area of environmental protection, but there are many other fields where such initiatives are needed.

Historical changes in the concept of 'culture'

It is also pertinent to note that the term 'culture' itself has shifted in meaning over time. In the fifteenth century, it referred to the tending of crops or to rearing animals. During the next two centuries it was used, by analogy, to refer to nurturing the human mind. During the eighteenth century, 'culture' became associated with the arts and scholarship – in philosophy and history, for example – and was considered to be for the wealthy. At about the same time, under the influence of the German philosopher Herder, an alternative view emerged, namely the idea of distinct and variable cultures, a view developed in the Romantic Movement. A generalised or 'essentialised' culture was regarded as the collective 'heritage' of the national group and identified with a particular ethnic group.

This closed view of cultures came into early social anthropology, where cultures were compared to different types of living organism and seen as clearly distinct from one another. Cultures either survived or

died out, with no possibility of the formation of new cultural expressions through cultural interaction. This idea of uniform, completely distinct cultures is still to be found, for example, in the rhetoric of the political far right and in some popular newspapers in different European countries.

At the opposite extreme there are postmodern deconstructions of the idea of 'a culture', with any idea of continuous tradition being regarded as a 'metanarrative', a distorted account invented in their own interests by those with power. On this view, the way of life someone adopts is a matter of personal, individual choice.

In between these two poles are intermediary positions, emphasising the changing and contested nature of cultures over time. One of these is the view that cultures are internally diverse, but with cultural continuity maintained through inherited ideas, and expressed through particular symbols. Another position emphasises internal (sometimes inter-generational) conflict or negotiation in creating cultural change over time. This latter position also draws attention to the role of the *observer* (whether anthropologist, historian, journalist or student) in constructing 'cultures'. On this view, as with biographies, single definitive accounts of a culture are not possible.

There are also those who see culture not so much as an 'object' but as an active process through which humans produce meaning and change. Instead of having a distinct and fixed cultural identity, individuals and groups identify with elements of culture, or create new culture through bringing different elements together. The emphasis is on people *engaging with* culture, making use of different cultural resources. The emphasis in identity formation is less on descent and inheritance, and more on a series of identifications through dialogue and communication with others.

2.2 Cultural discourses

Field research by social scientists has revealed that, in people's everyday discourse about culture, there are both inflexible and flexible approaches to ethnicity, religion and nationality. For example, in some situations, there are those whose interests are to present a rigid view of culture (or cultures) together with reified or abstracted views of ethnicity, religion and nationality. Thus, national identity is sometimes described as if it were a fixed identity or entity, with its own distinct culture, related to a closed view of ethnicity and religion. Such closed views provide simplistic criteria for judging whether someone is 'truly' Polish, French, Greek, or whatever. Similarly, both outsiders and insiders might use terminology such as 'the Muslim community' or 'Asian culture', when it suits their purposes. This tendency to reify – to treat an abstract idea as though it were a concrete

reality – has been called the 'dominant discourse' about culture. Dominant discourse is often used by extremist groups, politicians, the media and sometimes by cultural communities themselves.

Dominant discourse can be distinguished from *'demotic discourse'*, the language of culture *making*, which often becomes used when people from different backgrounds interact in discussing issues of common concern or engaging in projects of mutual interest. Demotic discourse views culture as multifaceted and diverse in its range of values, beliefs, practices and traditions – some of which may be recent inventions – and hence as negotiable and subject to personal choice, and as a dynamic process through which both meanings and the boundaries of groups or communities are renegotiated and redefined according to current needs.

From the perspective of cultural discourse, then, 'culture' may be seen both as something belonging to a particular national, ethnic or religious 'community', and as a *dynamic process* relying on personal choice.

2.3 Multicultural societies

In the context of this paper, the term 'multicultural society' is used to denote a society which has become culturally diverse as a consequence of the immigration of people who have been born and raised in other cultures and who have therefore brought elements of their heritage culture to the new society in which they have settled. (This use is therefore to be differentiated from the use of the term 'multiculturalism' to refer to the public policy of formally recognising and politically accommodating minority communities equally alongside the majority community.)

Some views of multicultural societies have been expressed entirely in terms of dominant discourse, picturing cultures as distinct traditions, with minority cultures functioning in their own private space, and depending on the values of the dominant culture for their continued existence. However, evidence from field research shows that this idea of a multicultural society does not correspond to real life experience. Not only are the boundaries between groups unclear, but minority cultures, religions and ethnicities are themselves internally pluralistic, and the symbols and values of their various constituent groups are open to negotiation, contest and change. Moreover, individuals from any background may identify with values associated with a range of sources. At the same time, there are also those who claim a more bounded cultural identity. Thus, a multicultural society is not a patchwork of several fixed cultural identities, but a network of crosscutting networks and identifications which are situated, contested, dynamic and fluid and heavily dependent on

context. Thus, the research evidence is consistent with demotic rather than dominant discourse about culture.

Of crucial importance for the maintenance and development of multicultural societies is the provision of educational strategies that raise awareness of the debates and foster intercultural dialogue and communication. Educational strategies need to identify common or overlapping ideas and values, but they must also identify and address difference. The reflective analysis of intercultural encounters or exchanges is one such strategy to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

2.4 Plurality

All European societies exhibit some degree of diversity or 'plurality' in the spheres of culture, religion and values. First, there is the plurality that corresponds to the observable cultural diversity present in many western societies, usually resulting from the immigration of peoples from other cultural backgrounds or, in certain cases, the presence of multiple indigenous national and ethnic groups within a country. This form of plurality, which draws attention to different groups within a society, has been called 'traditional plurality'.

Another form of plurality reflects the fact that, in contemporary western societies, individuals are often in a position to choose values and ideas from a variety of sources. Individuals may reject religions and their claims, for example, and base their values on some form of non-religious philosophy such as secular humanism. Others might synthesise beliefs and values from religious and humanistic sources. Individuals might describe themselves as being from a particular religious background, but cease to hold some of the religious beliefs that orthodox believers hold. It is not uncommon to find individuals valuing some form of spirituality, while rejecting traditional religious beliefs. Such individuals might make their own personal synthesis of ideas from different religious and spiritual sources, just as they might utilise a range of cultural ideas and practices. This form of plurality has sometimes been called 'modern' or 'postmodern plurality'.

It is important to note the intertwined relationship between traditional and modern/postmodern plurality. Thus, changes and developments within a cultural tradition – for example, changes in beliefs and practices across the generations – have to be seen not just in terms of traditional plurality, but under influences from modern/postmodern plurality. When studied empirically, cultures can be seen to encompass some variety of belief, practice and expression. Attention to modern/postmodern plurality accentuates this diversity within cultures even more and blurs their edges. In studying cultures, it is clear that this diversity needs to be taken

into account in order to avoid stereotyping.

2.5 Pluriculturality

The term 'pluricultural', used to describe a person, implies that the person has the competences which are required to function as a social actor within two or more cultures. Being pluricultural can therefore be distinguished from being monocultural. Pluriculturality involves identifying with at least some of the values, beliefs and/or practices of two or more cultures, and acquiring the linguistic and behavioural competences which are necessary for actively participating in those cultures. Many people living within multicultural societies are pluricultural, although pluricultural individuals are more likely to come from ethnic minority than ethnic majority backgrounds. This is because minority individuals usually have to negotiate not only aspects of their own ethnic heritage culture, but also aspects of the dominant majority national culture in which they live. By contrast, members of the majority group may not need to adopt any of the values, beliefs or practices of another group, especially if they live in an ethnically homogeneous geographical area in which few minority individuals live.

Studies of pluricultural individuals indicate that there may be positive benefits to actively embracing multiple cultures. For example, it has been found that minority individuals who adopt a pluricultural orientation are better adapted, both psychologically and socioculturally, than minority individuals who orientate themselves primarily towards just one culture (whether this be their own ethnic culture or the majority national culture). These pluricultural individuals are more likely to have higher self-esteem, higher levels of life-satisfaction, fewer psychological problems, fewer behaviour problems, and (in adolescence) better levels of school adjustment compared with minority individuals who adopt a monocultural orientation.

Pluricultural individuals can express their pluriculturality in a number of different ways. Some individuals simultaneously affirm their multiple cultural allegiances irrespective of context. For example, children born of mixed-parentage often maintain a simultaneous allegiance to the distinctive cultural heritages of both their parents. However, other pluricultural individuals commonly engage in what has been called 'alternation' or 'code-switching'. For example, minority youth whose ethnic culture is very distinct from the prevailing national peer culture frequently adopt ethnic values and practices within the family home but then switch to the national peer culture when they are outside the home, either at school or out with their friends. These young people can be highly skilled at navigating and negotiating different cultures across different contexts and life domains. A third way in which pluriculturality

may be expressed is through hybridity, that is, through the eclectic fusion of resources and elements drawn from multiple cultures to create a novel cultural synthesis. For example, the Bhangra and Bollywood Remix scenes are two hybridised South Asian/Western pop music subcultures which youth of South Asian heritage living in Western Europe and North America have generated through a process of cultural synthesis.

2.6 Interculturality

'Pluriculturality' therefore needs to be distinguished from 'interculturality' in the sense in which the latter term is being used in the context of this paper. Pluriculturality refers to the capacity to identify with and participate in multiple cultures. Interculturality refers to the capacity to experience cultural otherness, and to use this experience to reflect on matters that are usually taken for granted within one's own culture and environment. Interculturality involves being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic towards people from other cultures, and using this heightened awareness of otherness to evaluate one's own everyday patterns of perception, thought, feeling and behaviour in order to develop greater self-knowledge and self-understanding. Interculturality thus enables people to act as mediators among people of different cultures, to explain and interpret different perspectives. It also enables people to function effectively and achieve interactional and transactional goals in situations where cultural otherness and difference are involved. Notice that, according to this definition, interculturality does not involve identifying with another cultural group or adopting the cultural practices of the other group.

Interculturality entails a number of underlying cognitive, affective and behavioural competences. These include knowledge (for example, knowledge about other cultural groups and their products and practices, and knowledge about the ways in which people of different cultures interact), attitudes (such as curiosity, openness, respect for otherness and empathy), skills of interpreting and relating (for example, interpreting a practice from another culture and relating it to practices within one's own culture), skills of discovery (such as the ability to search out and acquire new knowledge about a culture and its practices and products), and critical cultural awareness (that is, the ability to evaluate critically the practices and products of one's own and other cultures). These underlying competences are discussed in greater detail in Section 4 of this paper.

2.7 Tolerance, respect and intercultural dialogue

An intrinsic aspect of analysing intercultural encounters and exchanges is therefore the reflective process of relating new knowledge to one's own self-understanding and values. Sensitivity is an important element in attempting to understand another's way of life. However, part of the reflective process is to relate new understanding to one's own values and beliefs. In this respect it is helpful to clarify the concepts of 'tolerance', 'respect' and 'intercultural dialogue'.

The concept of *'tolerance'* is often used in the literal sense of the word, as 'enduring' (Latin: tolerare) something, even that with which we do not agree or appreciate. In this sense tolerance suggests the need for people of different cultural backgrounds to develop the ability at least to endure the fact that others believe and live differently within a particular society, or in the wider world, although they might share some core values. In addition to being an individual attitude, tolerance can be a guiding principle for state relations regarding cultural diversity, whereby the state accepts the existence of a variety of traditions and cultures. Tolerance can thus – in both senses – be seen as a *minimum* standard or precondition for peaceful co-existence in multicultural societies.

The concept *'respect'* refers to a more positive attitude, where one does not simply tolerate difference, but regards it as having a positive value. Before one can respect a way of life, or a person, one needs to have some fairly close acquaintance with or understanding of it, her or him. Respect, as defined here, can be combined with tolerance, since it does not require agreement with that which is respected, but can be seen as a way of appreciating 'the other' and his or her differences, thus reducing the need for toleration (in the above sense).

Approaching 'other' ways of life, and those who practise them, with tolerance and respect can be seen as steps in the direction of interculturality, and both tolerance and respect are necessary prerequisites for effective intercultural dialogue to take place. The term *'intercultural dialogue'* itself refers to an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups from different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage. Such dialogue is based on mutual understanding, openness and a genuine respect for and appreciation of diversity, equal human dignity and equal human rights. It involves a positive attitude towards diversity, seeing the meeting between people with different beliefs and cultural practices as enriching for all, and seeing individual identity as being developed through meeting 'otherness'. As such, intercultural dialogue is an important tool for achieving social cohesion within multicultural societies and for

fostering a sense of inclusiveness in which no individual or group is marginalised or defined as outsiders.

Tolerance, respect and intercultural dialogue do not require one to see all cultures, practices and beliefs as equally true or valuable. Rather, they are based on the fact that one approaches other people, groups and practices with a certain identity and worldview of one's own, although these might change and develop through encounters and exchanges with others from different backgrounds. Tolerance, respect and intercultural dialogue therefore do not imply indifference, relativism (the idea that contrary beliefs from different religious or cultural settings are equally true) or syncretism (the combination of different forms of belief). However, effective intercultural dialogue does require the acquisition of intercultural competences, including multiperspectivity and the ability to see oneself, situations and events from the perspectives of cultural 'others'.

2.8 Importance of the image of the 'other' in history

In encounters between cultures, the image of the 'other' can play a crucial role. This image may encourage or hinder contact, depending on whether it suggests that the other person is approachable or, on the contrary, distant, and whether he or she is attached to familiar traditions or to ones that are little known. Furthermore, the 'other' is generally perceived not as an isolated individual but as a member of a community that has the same characteristics.

The importance of the image of the 'other' in relations between cultures is further proof of the strength of the link between history and culture, for it is, to a very large extent, history that shapes the image of the 'other' even before he or she is encountered. All the types of messages to which history gives rise contribute to this and, of course, elicit both perceptions that reflect reality and impressions that are wrong.

National history, particularly in the form that was for a long time taught in schools, plays a key role here. This national history, even when written by professional historians, often conveys biased views of the authors' own country or other countries. It offers interpretations that, in presenting particular periods or events, either highlight feelings of self-satisfaction or despair in the home country in the face of developments, or hold those considered as enemies to blame for everything. National history of this kind has sought to endow each European people with an exceptional destiny and portray those suspected of threatening it as adversaries to be wiped out. In the history textbooks that were used in schools in western Europe until shortly after the Second World War, and are sometimes still being used elsewhere

today, these failings bred myths and 'national stories' that were justified on the grounds of the need to provide young people with the references necessary in order to foster a national consciousness and instil patriotism. As a result, national history was for a long time a 'history of battles', focusing on wars won or lost, and it did much to impose negative and threatening images of the 'other', with whom encounters and dialogue were portrayed as impossible. At the same time, a history more concerned with cultural realities has, over the centuries, always had its advocates and has often enabled Europeans to gain different impressions, generally of distant peoples, thanks to their literary or artistic outputs. But colonisation frequently ended up, there too, by imposing images of the 'other' that were similar to those disseminated by national history, presenting the reactions of these peoples to the 'civilising mission' of the West either as the acceptance of influence, which won them the status of friends, or as a manifestation of resistance, which placed them in the category of enemies.

2.9 Children's and adolescents' views of people from other cultures

Early studies by psychologists into how children acquire their views and images of people from other cultures suggested that these are acquired in a universally similar manner, irrespective of children's own cultural background and irrespective of the particular intercultural encounters which they themselves have experienced. Based on the psychological theories of Piaget, it was argued that attitudes to other people are dependent on a person's underlying cognitive representations of the social world, with these representations developing in a universally similar way. Major transitions in both general thinking about the world, and in views of people from other cultures, were postulated to take place at two junctures in the child's development, at about 6-7 years of age and 11-12 years of age. It was suggested that before 6-7 years, cognitive egocentricity resulted in the child holding a positive view of his or her own cultural group and negative views of other groups. After the age of 6-7 years, as levels of egocentricity decline and understanding of cultural groups develop, it was thought that attitudes to ingroups became less positive and attitudes to outgroups less negative. Finally, at 11-12 years of age, as a result of the acquisition of the capacity for more abstract thought, further changes in tolerance to other cultural groups were postulated to take place as a consequence of the adolescent's enhanced capacity to make logical judgements.

However, more recent research has revealed a much more complex picture. A conceptual distinction may be drawn between a *'stereotype'* on the one hand and *'prejudice'* on the other. A stereotype is a simplified overgeneralisation about the characteristics of the

people who belong to a particular group. In evaluative terms, stereotypes about cultural groups can be positive, neutral or negative. Prejudice, however, is an organised predisposition to respond to individuals on the basis of their social group memberships rather than on the basis of their own individual characteristics. Strictly speaking, one may have either positive or negative prejudices towards a group of people ('prejudice' literally means 'pre-judgement'), but the common use of the term restricts it to negative predispositions towards groups of people. Negative prejudices are frequently based upon negative stereotypes of the groups concerned. A third related concept is *'discrimination'*, which denotes the unequal treatment of people who belong to particular groups on the basis of their group memberships. As such, discrimination refers to behaviour rather than attitudes. A fourth more general term, *'attitude'*, is used to denote the entire structure which consists of the conceptual descriptive content of the stereotype, the positive or negative evaluation which is carried by that stereotype, the affect or feeling associated with the stereotype, and the behavioural disposition which is associated with all of these.

Post-Piagetian studies into the development of stereotyping and prejudice in children have revealed that, contrary to the Piagetian picture, a diversity of different developmental profiles is in fact exhibited by children. For example, sometimes children's stereotypes of people from other ethnic and national groups, and their feelings towards these people, actually become more negative (rather than more positive) with increasing age. However, sometimes their stereotypes and attitudes initially become more positive but then become more negative at a later point in development; in other cases, stereotypes and attitudes initially become more negative before becoming more positive once again. Cases have also been found where children and adolescents do not show any changes in their evaluations of, and feelings towards, people from other cultures with increasing age. A similar diversity of profiles has been found in the development of children's stereotypes of, and feelings about, their own ethnic and national groups. And perhaps rather curiously, children's stereotypes and evaluations of cultural groups do not always show a clear relationship to their actual friendships with other children.

Although children and adolescents often display what is called *'ingroup favouritism'* (that is, they hold more positive attitudes towards their own group than towards any other group), the phenomenon of ingroup favouritism is not universal. Indeed, in some cases, they may hold much more positive views about other cultural groups than they do about their own group. For example, studies have found that many children across the world hold very positive stereotypes of American culture and American people, and in some cases these are even more positive than their stereotypes of their own culture and national group. That said, children and adolescents do usually exhibit ingroup favouritism when

they are asked how they *feel* about and how much they like various cultural groups including their own.

2.10 Factors influencing attitudes to people from other cultures

This variability in the development of attitudes to people from other cultures has been traced to a number of factors. These include the specific societal structure in which the individual lives, and the relative social status of the individual's own cultural group within that structure. For example, when an individual belongs to a group which is of relatively low social status, more positive attitudes may be held towards higher status cultural groups than towards the individual's own group. Family discourse and practices in relationship to cultural groups, and the use of multiple languages within the family home, are also related to the attitudes which children acquire towards other cultural groups. In addition, the contents of the school curriculum, especially curriculum coverage of issues relating to racism and discrimination, can influence children's attitudes to other groups. For this reason, there are now a number of educational programmes which have been developed to teach children about other cultural groups in order to reduce levels of prejudice among children. The way in which cultural groups are represented in the mass media, especially television and cinema, also impact on the intercultural attitudes that people hold. For example, children who watch factual television programmes about other countries exhibit greater objectivity in their attitudes towards the people who live in those countries, and are less likely to assume the superiority of their own country.

Importantly, a further factor which can have a significant impact on the development of attitudes to people from other cultures is *personal contact* with individuals from another culture. Many studies have now revealed that when individuals from different cultural groups meet and communicate with each other, such contact can lead to more positive attitudes towards the other group in general and not merely towards the specific individual with whom the interaction has taken place. That said, there is also evidence that if the wrong conditions prevail, more negative attitudes can result. The conditions under which intercultural contact has maximum positive effect on attitudes towards the other group include:

- when the individuals who meet and interact are of roughly equal status (for example, when both are school students of the same age);

- when the different cultural group memberships of these individuals are made salient within the contact situation (that is, when these memberships are emphasised and attention is drawn to them rather than underplayed);

• when they engage together on some co-operative activity (as in a co-operative learning task where the participating students are interdependent on each other for successfully completing the task);

• when, in the course of the interaction, they find things out about each other (for example, about each others' cultural practices);

• when there is external institutional support for the principle of equality (for example, when a school lays down clear and explicit expectations and rules about the unacceptability of any kind of harassment, discrimination or racism);

• when anxiety in the individuals who are involved in the intercultural encounter is low.

In other words, recent research has emphasised the role of socialisation factors (such as the family, the school, the mass media, and intercultural contact) rather than cognitive factors in how intercultural attitudes emerge and develop. However, this is not to say that *cognitive skills and competences* are not also linked to the development of intercultural attitudes. Indeed, there is clear evidence that, in children, the cognitive ability to attend to individual differences within cultural groups, and the ability to judge the deeper similarities between cultural groups which are superficially very different, are also linked to intercultural attitudes. Children who are high on these two cognitive skills have been found to be less prejudiced towards other groups than children who are low on these skills.

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters has been expressly designed to encourage and foster the development of the relevant cognitive competences which are required to engage effectively with people from other cultural groups and to appreciate the value and benefits of living within culturally diverse societies. These cognitive competences include the abilities to interpret, explain and relate cultural information, and the ability to evaluate critically the perspectives, practices and products of different cultural groups.

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).

Identity theorists emphasise that that the various identifications which a person holds interact with each other in driving that person's values, attitudes, judgements and behaviours. They also emphasise that the meanings, evaluations and symbolic contents which an individual attaches to any particular social group membership (such as their national, ethnic, racial or religious group membership) are personalised and customised as a consequence of that individual's personal history and life experiences. Thus, the connotations which a white, male, middle-class Christian living in Versailles associates with being French will be very different from those which a female, working-class Muslim of North African heritage living in Clichy-sous-Bois associates with being French. It is because all individuals have multiple identifications which interact with each other, and because the meanings, evaluations and symbolic contents of these identifications are personalised, that no two people exhibit exactly the same identifications conveying identical subjective connotations. This is one reason why all cultural groups are so internally diverse.

A further aspect of multiple identifications that has been emphasised by identity theorists is that these multiple identifications are never all activated simultaneously. Instead, the subjective salience of any particular identification fluctuates and changes in a dynamic and fluid manner as the individual moves from context to context, according to the specific contrasts which are present within the situation and according to that individual's own personal expectations, motivations and needs in that situation. In other words, a person's national, ethnic, racial and religious identifications are not always salient to him or her irrespective of context. However, identifications can become very salient when confronted with 'difference' of one kind or another (for example, when travelling abroad, watching an international sporting event, or meeting an individual from another ethnic or religious group). This is why intercultural encounters provide an ideal opportunity for reflecting on, and critically appraising, identifications.

A key aim of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters is to encourage, facilitate and scaffold participants in using the intercultural encounters which they themselves have personally experienced in order to evaluate their own identifications. One of the underlying assumptions of the Autobiography

is that, when an individual encounters a member of another cultural group, and critically reflects on that experience, this can initiate a process of self-reflection and self-examination. As a consequence, intercultural encounters can precipitate change not only in attitudes towards the cultural group of the other person but also in attitudes towards one's own group. This critical reappraisal of the ingroup may even lead to changes in patterns of identification. Intercultural encounters are therefore a prime site in which identifications can be re-evaluated, revised, customised and personalised through the construction of new meanings, values and symbolic contents.

2.12 Nationality and citizenship

National identity and nationality are often confused with citizenship. Indeed, the terms 'nationality' and 'citizenship' are frequently used synonymously to refer to the legal status individuals have. There is an erroneous assumption that the nation and the state are identical, when they are most often not. A number of conceptual distinctions need to be drawn.

Nations, states and nation-states

A *'nation'* is a named human community which lives in its historic homeland, and which has a shared history that has been codified and standardised, myths of common ancestry, shared symbols, traditions and practices (which may include a common language), and which exhibits self-awareness as a nation and is politicised in asserting its status as a nation. By contrast, a *'state'* is a sovereign political entity in which a government uses a set of institutions to exercise an administrative monopoly over a territory which has clearly demarcated borders, where the rule of that government is sanctioned by law and backed up with the threat of coercion or violence. States are therefore characterised by precisely specified borders, within which governments exercise sovereign jurisdiction.

It is because nations are different types of entities from states that there are many *'stateless nations'* in the world. By the same token, there are many *'multination states'*, that is, states which contain more than a single nation within their borders. Members of indigenous minority national groups who live within a multination state may have the same state citizenship but a different national identity from members of the majority national group. They may also aspire to political independence and self-governance for their own nation, although this is not always the case, especially when the social, political and/or economic welfare of their nation is viewed as benefiting from membership of the multination state. Most states also contain members of minority ethnic groups, who usually have an emotional or a symbolic link to a homeland elsewhere in the world from which they or their family migrated in the past. These individuals

may also share the same state citizenship whilst having a different ethnic identity from both the majority and minority national groups. Although the term *'nation-state'* is sometimes used as a synonym for both 'nation' and 'state', there are actually very few true nation-states, that is, states in which the borders enclose just a single national group. Despite this reality, the concept of the nation-state is still an extremely powerful myth for many people and it continues to have sufficient potency to drive popular nationalistic movements in many states.

Given these conceptual distinctions, it is more accurate to reserve the terms *'nationality'* and *'national identity'* to refer to the sense of belonging to a nation and the term *'citizenship'* to refer to the legal status of belonging to a state.

Citizenship, rights and obligations

Being a legal status of formal relationship of individual to state, citizenship involves having rights and obligations within the state. These rights are often thought to include civil rights, political rights and social rights. Civil rights include rights under law to personal liberty, freedom of speech, association, religious toleration and freedom from censorship. Political rights include rights to participate in political processes, while social rights include rights of access to social benefits and resources such as education, economic security and state welfare services. Obligations include respect for the law, respect for the rights of others, and ensuring that those who have been entrusted with political power are held answerable for their actions. From an intercultural perspective, the obligations of citizenship also include open-mindedness, willingness to engage in dialogue and to allow others to express their point, resolving conflicts through peaceful means, and opposing stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

Education for citizenship is a preparation for enjoying the rights and obligations of citizenship. It aims to prepare and empower individuals for active rather than passive citizenship by equipping them with the competences which are needed for participating fully in the life of the state or society by exercising their rights and obligations.

Active citizenship and participation

In the study of active citizenship, a distinction is sometimes drawn between political versus civic participation. *'Political participation'* refers to activity which is aimed at influencing regional or national government (or, in the case of Europe, supranational government), either by influencing the selection of the people who form that government, or by trying to influence the contents of the public policies which a government implements. Political participation there-fore includes both conventional activities relating to

electoral processes (e.g., voting, election campaigning, etc.) and non-conventional activities which take place outside the electoral process (e.g., signing petitions, writing letters to politicians, participating in political demonstrations, etc.). By contrast, *'civic participation'* refers to activities which are focused on solving community problems, helping others, or achieving a public good. Civic participation therefore includes working on charitable causes, belonging to community organisations, attending meetings about issues of concern, and consumer activism (i.e., boycotting or preferentially buying particular goods or services).

While conventional political participation is currently declining in a number of European states, there is evidence that many young people are now engaging in higher levels of non-conventional and civic participation than in the past. Thus, issues that might previously have stimulated young people into conventional political activity are now being addressed through protests, petitions, community or charitable activities or consumer activism instead. Some of the causes which are being pursued by young people in this way transcend the territorial borders of individual states (e.g., working for global environmental causes). Insofar as it is possible to engage in these kinds of activities without having the formal legal status of a citizen, being barred from conventional political participation does not prevent individuals from participating in the life of their society through these non-conventional and civic routes. Thus, individuals without legal citizenship status (such as migrants), and who are thereby excluded from conventional political participation, may nevertheless be highly active citizens within these alternative arenas.

Historical perspectives on the concept of citizenship

A historical understanding of the concept of citizenship helps to highlight how this notion is currently acquiring increasingly broad connotations. If we go back to ancient Greek and Rome, where it originated, the concept of citizenship merely denoted possession of the status of citizen, which was reserved for a minority of the population. The situation changed little in Europe until the end of the 18th century, by which time there was a predominance of monarchical systems or empires in which there was no longer any question of citizenship, but where the existence of 'states' enjoying various advantages gave certain persons a status that was comparable to that of the citizens of ancient times in terms of rarity, although it was not matched by any right of oversight over the sovereign's decisions.

The major change occurred with the American and French Revolutions, which reverted in a way to the ancient conception of citizenship, in the sense of belonging to a democracy and being able to exercise the attendant rights, though this status was in principle afforded to all nationals. The effective implementation of this principle, however, necessitated lengthy and laborious interpretations of the notion of citizenship. France, Britain and the United States had different views about the abolition of slavery, and it was subsequently frequently necessary to draw attention to all that remained to be done to ensure that the rights of every citizen were duly recognised. As a result, citizenship eventually came to be envisaged in terms of three fundamental aspects: the political aspect, which entailed the right to participate in the political system, the civil aspect, which entailed individual freedom of thought and speech, and the welfare aspect, which meant guaranteeing the security needed for people to be able to live the lives of civilised beings. From this perspective, it was perhaps inevitable that the initially strong reference to the state and to the political dimension of the concept of citizenship would eventually give way to interest in other forms or aspects of society. Thus, in some federal states, for example the Soviet Union, citizenship was explicitly distinguished from nationality.

In recent decades, Europe has begun to undergo further changes as states have become members of the European Union. For citizens of the member states, this has brought an additional legal status as citizens of the European Union, with additional rights and obligations. Furthermore, the European Union hopes and expects that this legal status will also become an additional identity, a sense of belonging to Europe, and that language learning will foster that feeling, as people learn at least two other European languages in addition to their own. The Council of Europe holds the same position of encouraging the development in Europeans of a European identity in which being plurilingual will be a significant indicator of being European. For its part, UNESCO, in promoting international education and international understanding, is envisaging some of these approaches on a world scale, separating citizenship still further from any form of institutional underpinning.

At this point, citizenship may appear to be based more on social and cultural values than on political ones. The question then is to determine to what extent we are still dealing with a concept of citizenship of the same order as that which has prevailed to date. These are conceptions of citizenship which may seem to be taking us into uncharted waters, but which correspond to the new conditions of political life in a globalised world where communication reigns supreme. In this context, the key standards are those of the 'ideal speech situation'. It must therefore be acknowledged that the scope of the exercise of citizenship and the arrangements for it need to change radically.

2.13 Plurilingualism

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters facilitates the individual's exploration of their intercultural experiences from a number of different perspectives, language being one of these. Reflection on the role language plays in intercultural encounters, and how language is modified when individuals come from different linguistic backgrounds and adapt or 'accommodate' to each other in their use of language, is an important characteristic of the encounter. This may entail that one individual in the contact situation has reached a degree of competence in one foreign language. It may also entail that individuals speaking 'the same' language become aware of different varieties within the language. Both constitute a first step towards language awareness in intercultural contact situations.

In a Europe whose most defining marks of identity are its cultural and linguistic diversity, plurilingualism has recently been granted unprecedented importance. *'Multilingualism'* – the presence of many languages in Europe – is considered part of the European cultural heritage but it has also been seen as an obstacle for mutual understanding and communication. It has even been considered a limiting factor for European democracy.

'Plurilingualism' – the ability of individuals to use more than one language or variety of language – is proposed not only as a pragmatic means of overcoming multilingualism as an obstacle. It is seen as a means to gain access to the European cultural heritage, and as a marker of a European identity. Plurilingualism is expected by some people to lead to a sense of belonging to Europe. Furthermore, the plurilingualism of individuals is considered one of the means of finding a balance between cultural and linguistic diversity and the development of a common communicative sphere. In this context, language education, education for plurilingualism and education for plurilingual awareness are key elements.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages defines plurilingualism as:

> …the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe, 2001, p168)

Plurilingualism is the individual's ability to communicate in two or more languages, including the first language or mother tongue and other languages or language varieties. A person with plurilingual competence has a repertoire of languages and language varieties at various levels of competence and in some skills and not others. That competence may change over a lifetime as one language or variety becomes useful and important to a person and another loses importance; plurilingualism is thus dynamic and changing. Competence in more than one variety of a language is as important as in two or more distinct languages; the distinction between two languages is often a political decision rather than a linguistic one.

Language varieties and variation within a language/variety reflect differences of region, level of education and social standing, subject matter, medium of communication and attitude to otherness. People adapt their language and choose from their plurilingual repertoire to accommodate to the situation and the people with whom an interaction takes place, and this becomes particularly complex in an intercultural and plurilingual context, with transfer between and among varieties being a common phenomenon

Plurilingualism acknowledges the importance of *'intercomprehension'*, the use of one's own language whilst understanding the languages of others. This is possible through the phenomenon of language 'families', i.e. languages which have evolved from the same origins but changed over time. Such languages may seem mutually incomprehensible but with the acquisition of certain competences, speakers of language within a language family can learn to understand each other. Including intercomprehension in language education is a useful strategy given that many European languages are comprehended within one of three 'language families': Romance, Germanic and Slavonic.

Intercomprehension can then be one of the keys to the development of access to European linguistic and cultural diversities and thus of political, social and economic significance. Education for intercomprehension can also contribute towards learners' motivation and autonomy, creating opportunities for intercultural education.

2.14 Languages and social, political and economic inclusion

The significance of plurilingualism lies in the intertwined concepts of social, political and economic inclusion.

Democratic citizenship as a participative activity rests, to a large extent, on language competence, since language competence constitutes a prerequisite for the practice of democratic citizenship in multicultural arenas. Given the diversity of languages in Europe,

successful communication in democratic processes and activities among the citizens of Europe depends on their plurilingual repertoire.

Furthermore, plurilingualism creates the necessary conditions for mobility across Europe either for leisure or for work purposes, providing economic opportunities for the individual.

The importance of languages in democratic and economic processes means that plurilingualism is related to the notion of language rights as part of human rights. In particular, this refers to the need for education policies which take into account all the varieties of languages spoken in Europe and the recognition of language rights as a crucial element in the resolution of social conflicts.

The part played by plurilingualism in exercising European citizenship and acquiring a European identity involves a re-consideration of existing identities. Languages are usually associated with national identities and it is the national curriculum, the (de facto) official language(s) of the state and the whole process of socialisation undergone by the individual in a particular society that reinforce national identities. Learning one or more foreign languages, hence, entails comparing it with one's own and questioning the native language and culture and this process may have an effect on the individual which is not only cognitive but also affective. Plurilingualism has the potential to be a mark of supranational or European citizenship and to extend individuals' horizons provided that they do not feel their local and national identities under threat.

The promotion of plurilingualism also aims to redress the balance between the status and role of languages across Europe. There is a de facto dominance of English which needs to be questioned. The *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe (Executive Version)* recognises the need to consider the privileged position English has in Europe:

> The special position of English as a global lingua franca necessitates a different approach to the teaching of English. As a lingua franca it does not have as its main aim to enrich learners culturally but is above all considered as a skill whose perceived market value leads to social demand for it to be taught. This has to be done, however, without impairing the teaching of other languages. (2003: 20)

Modern technology, international contacts among individuals and economic globalisation have created an unprecedented need for a global language, which is, and will probably be in the near future, English. Yet English can also be experienced as a hegemonic force which introduces new ways of thinking without people being fully aware of them, and accepting them as normal. When this becomes a conscious phenomenon, people become aware of relations of inequality among languages, an inequality which is becomes more conflictive if languages are under threat of disappearing.

The Council of Europe promotes plurilingualism as a measure against linguistic homogenisation, even though the dominance of English as the first foreign language taught across Europe is unquestionable. Measures to counteract that dominance include guides for policy development and for design of curricula for plurilingualism.

The advantage of lingua franca English is that it allows speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Europe and elsewhere to have their voices heard and to interact directly without the need of mediators or translators. For this reason, plurilingualism needs to include proficiency in English and an awareness of the limitations of any lingua franca to convey subtleties of culture-specific meanings, as otherwise there may be damage both to democratic participation and devaluation of linguistic diversity.

2.15 The concept of intercultural citizenship

As multicultural societies became the norm in the modern world, it proved necessary to envisage yet another, less exclusive sense of belonging, an attachment not so much to a political entity but to a society and culture. Even though tensions persist between the various cultures in society, these cultures are less and less able to ignore one another completely. The history of multicultural societies is therefore both that of antagonism, which is sometimes virulent and tenacious, and that of efforts to organise encounters and reconcile the various communities. Laborious and tentative though these efforts may be, they eventually lead to progress, as is borne out in South Africa and Northern Ireland.

There is reason to believe that we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of citizenship, which can more suitably be described as intercultural than multicultural. The latter term may, on the face of it, seem more appropriate, since this new form of citizenship inherently concerns a plurality of cultures. The multiple references that would need to be included would, however, imply their juxtaposition rather than their incorporation into a coherent whole. It therefore seems preferable to envisage *'intercultural citizenship'*, which clearly reflects the need to transcend a diversity that is divisive and find one that draws people together. This is clearly what is intended in the concept of intercultural citizenship. It implies that, instead of being closed in on themselves and in conflict with one another, cultures are able to rise above themselves, engage in communication and exchange and set aside hostility and confrontation. This should prompt the members of these societies

to display attitudes based on respect, tolerance and mutual understanding, these being the only means of ensuring that intercultural citizenship is not just an attractive but unattainable ideal.

The question arises as to whether the concept of citizenship allows these new approaches. It was initially used by states and, for this reason, it seems debatable whether it can necessarily be transposed to entities of a different nature. It should, however, be remembered that the form of citizenship introduced as a result of the French Revolution, which served as the original model, replaced provincial and even municipal loyalties and local patriotism, which had previously been accepted as the norm, with allegiance to the Republic. This form of citizenship therefore already implied a change of scale in people's sense of belonging, and there is no reason why this should not be envisaged again today.
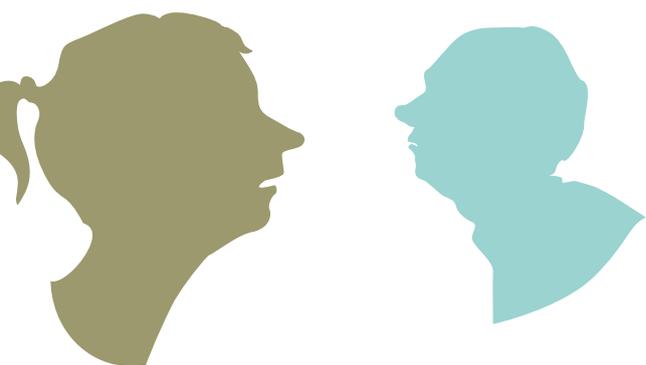
2.16 Active citizenship and education for intercultural citizenship

Participation in multicultural societies – enjoying one's rights and obligations and interacting with other people to improve the society in which one lives – presupposes plurilingual and intercultural competences among the individuals involved. Language education thus complements education for citizenship and education for political action.

A distinction may be made between foreign language education and education for (national) citizenship, in that the latter involves encouraging learners towards engagement and action in their local, regional or national society and community. Education for intercultural citizenship recognises that such engagement requires intercultural and plurilingual competences if learners are to engage with other citizens – whether of the same state or other states – and carry out action at a multiplicity of levels, including the local, regional, national and trans-national level, all of which involve multicultural communities.

The development of plurilingual competence thus favours participation in democratic processes and leads to a better understanding of the plurilingual repertoires of other individuals as well as a respect for language rights. It allows citizens' discourses to be heard beyond their national frontiers, at a European level. The development of plurilingual competence should go hand in hand with the development of intercultural competence since the latter promotes appropriate knowledge, understanding and attitudes for interaction with people of other cultures and social groups. Together, they have the potential to create transcultural communities of communication in multicultural areas, whether local or international.

Education which fosters the acquisition of plurilingual and intercultural competences and engagement with others in active participation in community life is education for intercultural citizenship. The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters can be used to foster intercultural understanding through the analysis of the linguistic factors in personal intercultural encounters and can thus encourage the development of language awareness.

3 Cultural boundaries
which may be crossed
in an intercultural encounter

In this section, we describe the variety of cultural boundaries across which an intercultural encounter may take place. Our aim here is to highlight the range of contexts across which the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters can be applied, and to explicate the nature of some of these boundaries.

3.1 Ethnic groups

There have been many attempts to define the term 'ethnic group', with varying degrees of success. Some authors have argued that an ethnic group can be said to exist when there are cultural differences between the members of a particular group and other people outside that group. Other authors have instead emphasised that ethnic groups are defined by their internal characteristics, such as their common adoption of particular cultural practices, by their allegiance to particular symbols, by their sense of common ancestry, or by a shared consciousness amongst group members of belonging to the same community.

More recently, some sociologists have come to use the term 'ethnic group' to denote a human community which has a number of characteristic rather than defining features (in other words, not all ethnic groups need necessarily display *all* of these features). These features include having a collective name to identify and distinguish the group from other groups, a subjective sense held by the members of the group that they share a common ancestry (which is a myth rather than a historically accurate representation), shared memories of a common historical past (including myths about the origins and genesis of the group and significant events and figures who have played a significant role in the history of the group), and common traditions, customs and practices (which may include a common religion or language). Ethnic groups also usually have a symbolic link to an ancestral homeland which is not necessarily the land in which they currently live, as well as a shared sense of solidarity and consciousness of belonging to the same group amongst its members.

These features draw attention to the cultural and psychological foundations of ethnic groups, whereby the members of an ethnic group are identified by their shared symbolic resources, shared cultural practices and common identity. However, it is important to re-emphasise here that all ethnic groups display high levels of internal diversity and plurality, with group members selecting, adapting and rejecting different aspects of their own ethnic culture, and sometimes utilising resources drawn from other cultures, in constructing their own customs and practices.

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters is pre-eminently suitable for assisting learners in their reflections on the inter-ethnic encounters which they have experienced and encouraging them to break down ethnic stereotypes, to explore the individuality of the people belonging to other ethnic groups and to appreciate the internal diversity of other ethnic cultures.

3.2 Religious groups

There are no straightforward answers to the question, 'What are religions?' Their diverse origins and histories make a simple definition impossible, and the inter-relationship between religion and other aspects of identity and culture further complicate the picture. Some religions are closely bound to a shared history or associated with a particular geographical area or nation (e.g., Judaism, Shintoism), while others (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Islam) are more universal and global in their reference and scope. Religions have had a decisive influence on cultures across the world, for example in art forms, modes of dress, diet, social structures, and relations between genders. However, it would be misleading to understand religions solely as identity signifiers and cultural phenomena.

Different religions share a reference to the transcendent, whether through belief in God or gods or through a mode of spirituality that goes beyond ordinary experience (as in some forms of Buddhism). Individual religions are often understood to be distinct systems of belief. This understanding accords with the concept

of a revelation of divine truths and with the desire discernible in Christian and Islamic traditions, for example, to establish what beliefs and actions are necessary for entry into eternal life, or are pleasing to God, and to pass them on. Doctrinal differences within both traditions have generated debate and sometimes conflict, yet in spite of disagreements and variations in belief there remain core tenets of faith that serve to define the religions, for example the oneness of Allah in Islam, the centrality of Jesus to Christianity. Partly because of the prominence of these religions, a formalised, belief-system model has come to dominate modern western conceptualisations of other religious traditions, often imposing unifying frameworks on the mass of diverse and disparate practices encountered through expansion into other parts of the world.

Interpreting religion in this way can lead to an easy assumption that each of the religions has its own distinct set of fixed beliefs and practices on which all insiders agree. It does not acknowledge the considerable varia- tion within religions or the position of those people who develop their personal philosophy or spirituality from a variety of sources. One of the benefits of encounter with individuals from different religious backgrounds is that it tends to reveal this diversity of practice, custom and belief. However, one of the dangers is that learners might be tempted to generalise from one encounter and make assumptions about a whole group or religion. They need to balance their knowledge of individual cases with a growing awareness and understanding of religious groups and wider religious traditions.

The nature of religion means that its ability to facilitate or hinder intercultural communication does not depend on participants' degrees of knowledge or skills of interpretation alone. Because of the claims to universal truth of many religious viewpoints and the mutability of religious identity, meetings between different religious perspectives can be occasions for a clash of ideas and opportunities for conversion. Concerns about the conflict potential of religion are sometimes used as arguments for avoiding a public airing of religious difference. European history offers many examples of discord fuelled by disagreements over religious truths and of one party trying to impose its religion on another. Yet a common enquiry after a shared truth has led to positive synergies between different schools of thought, religious and philosophical, that are part of the intellectual, cultural and religious heritage of Europe. A missionary desire to share religious truths with others has also contributed to an interest in 'the other' and the development of intercultural communication skills and tools including the recording and learning of a multiplicity of languages.

Religion can provide individuals and groups with other compelling arguments for intercultural communication, for example, the moral imperative towards welcoming the stranger and loving one's neighbour in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religions, and it is often members of faith communities who lead the way in dialogue with difference. The concern for peace between people of different religions in a troubled modern world gives added impetus to such encounters at local, national and international level.

3.3 Language groups

People are often identified and identify themselves by the language they speak. In some cases this corresponds exactly with their nationality and even their citizenship. In many cases, language corresponds with ethnicity and is one of the most prominent markers or symbols of belonging to an ethnic group, especially when the group is a mino- rity in a country. However, there are many other cases, especially among languages associated with countries which have been colonising powers in the past, where speaking a language is not an indication of belonging to a specific group. Those who speak English as their first or dominant language are the most widespread example of this; they include US Americans, Australians, British, (some) Canadians, (some) Indians, (some) South Africans and so on. German is a clear example in Europe where it is spoken by Austrians and Germans – and in a specific variety by (some) Swiss. In the case of French, there has been an attempt to create a new sense of belonging through speaking a language; this is the concept of 'la Francophonie' which brings together all those who speak French as a widespread and worldwide community.

The notion of a 'language group' is therefore in social and political terms very vague. However, it has a psycho- logical value in interaction with others, since inter- action with people speaking a different language – even where there may be some intercomprehensibility – is experienced as being of a different nature to interaction with people who speak 'the same' language.

In the same vein, people who speak 'the same' language, or different varieties of it, may well identify themselves as a group when faced with people speaking other languages. The dynamics of group formation lead to language groups evolving, however temporarily, because they facilitate communication and provide a sense of security. Conventions of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, are familiar and there is no requirement to make an effort to adapt to the conventions of others.

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters includes a section in which users are encouraged to reflect on the work which has to be done in interactions with people speaking other languages, whether it is an effort made to speak the other's language or an effort to adapt and accommodate one's own language to the competence level of the other.

3.4 Racial groups

Ethnicity is often confused with race. However, ethnicity and race are quite different constructs. This is because ethnicity is defined in terms of a group's cultural practices, symbolic resources and identity, whereas the term 'race' denotes a system of categories based on supposed biological differences between people, especially differences in skin pigmentation, hair texture and physiognomy. Biologists have long since demonstrated that it is impossible to classify people in terms of these kinds of physical features, as there is more variability in such features within each putative race than there is across the different races. For example, many so-called 'black' people have lighter skins than many 'white' people. Hair texture and physiognomy are similarly variable. Modern geneticists have confirmed this conclusion, having found that races cannot be construed as genetically discrete categories because there is no more genetic variability between the putative races than there is within them.

In other words, the term 'race' denotes a pseudo-biological set of categories which are socially constructed. The widespread perception that races are somehow 'real' biological categories is a consequence of social factors. These factors include racial prejudice, anti-miscegenation laws and social norms concerning marriage arrangements, all of which have, historically, prevented people belonging to different races from marrying and having children. In other words, race exists because human beings, living in different historical periods and in different cultures, have chosen to use features such as skin pigmentation, hair texture and physiognomy to divide people up into different categories (most often to justify the differential treatment of people socially, economically and politically, and to perpetuate existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage). It is because race is socially constructed that definitions of races have varied significantly across different historical periods and across different cultures, sometimes with curious consequences. For example, at the start of the twentieth century, southern and eastern Europeans were not included within the category of 'white' in some parts of North America, while in one case a group of migrating Irish children left New York as 'non-white' only to become 'white' when they arrived in Arizona shortly thereafter.

While we now have a much better understanding of the arbitrariness of all systems of racial categorisation, and their lack of any meaningful biological foundations, the social reality of race impacts very seriously indeed on the everyday lives of many individuals through racism, discrimination, inequality and disadvantage. For this reason, many authors today use the term 'racialised group' rather than 'race', where the concept of racialisation is used to draw attention to the fact that

races are socially constructed categories imposed on the social world through human discourse and social practices (rather than natural categories which can be found in the world).

The use of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters for the analysis of cross-racial encounters may, under appropriate supervision, lend itself well to an exploration of how race can impact on perceptions of both self and other. It may be particularly useful in the case of 'white' learners who, because of their own lack of personal experience of racist practices, have often not yet reflected on the nature of their own 'whiteness', instead regarding their racial category as conceptually unproblematic. Thus, the Autobiography can be used to initiate a wider discussion of the social-constructedness of race and its social consequences.

3.5 National and state groups

Another context in which the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters may be used is the analysis of encounters with individuals from other national and state groups. As has already been noted, nations need to be distinguished from states. Nations are named human communities living in their own historic homelands which share a common history, have a shared culture and have a politicised national self-awareness, whereas states are bordered territories within which governments exercise sovereign jurisdiction and power.

The nature of states has evolved considerably over the centuries. In pre-modern eras, many states had vague and poorly defined borders and were ruled by elites who rarely had direct contact with their populations. However, in modern times, as a consequence of industrialisation, international warfare, international post-war settlements, the introduction of mechanisms for collecting and storing information about entire populations, the appointment of professional bureaucracies to run states and the appointment of police to enforce laws within states, modern states have evolved into very precisely defined 'bordered power-containers'.

As far as nations are concerned, their historical origins have been a matter of dispute among scholars. Theorists belonging to the modernist school of thought have emphasised that nations, as we understand them today, have only emerged very recently in world history, in the wake of the French Revolution, and that they are distinctively modern entities representing a qualitatively new kind of polity, culture and community. Modernist scholars trace the emergence of nations to a variety of factors, including the institution of mass public education, the rise of print communities based on a single vernacular language, and the activities of intellectuals who invented national traditions which were deliberately designed to impart an illusion of continuity with the past.

By contrast, ethno-symbolist scholars emphasise the historical continuity between modern nations and pre-existing ethnic communities. They argue that, just like ethnic groups, national groups also have collective names, myths of ancestry, historical memories, and shared traditions, customs and practices, and they postulate that these are derived from those of pre-existing ethnic communities. Ethno-symbolists acknowledge that nations have since acquired further additional characteristics which differentiate them from ethnic groups *per se*. Firstly, nations typically occupy and live within their own historic homelands, whereas ethnic groups may only be linked symbolically to a homeland elsewhere in the world. Secondly, nations, unlike ethnic groups, have standardised and codified national histories which are explicitly taught to group members through the nation's educational system. Thirdly, nations have a common mass public culture, unlike many ethnic groups. Finally, nations also exhibit politicised self-awareness as a nation.

Once again, it is important to emphasise the enormous internal diversity of both nations and states. It is clear from research studies that individuals can relate to their own nation and state in a variety of different ways, and that there are no essential or defining values, meanings or symbols which all members of a particular nation or state will ascribe to their own national or state group.

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters may be used to encourage learners to reflect on their encounters with people from other nations as well as from other states. The analysis of such encounters may also be used, within a pedagogical context, to initiate a discussion of the different types of nations and states in the world, including nation-states, stateless nations and multination states, and of the wide variability which exists in how people identify with and relate to their own nation and state.

3.6 Local and regional groups

Within any given country, there is often considerable local and regional variation, with different localities and regions displaying their own distinctive customs, practices and traditions. Perhaps the most dramatic differences are those between the urban and rural regions of a country. However, different rural regions may also have different traditions and customs. The north-south divides in countries such as Italy, Germany and the UK are clear cases in point. Furthermore, sometimes individuals acquire a local or regional identity to which they feel a strong allegiance, attributing distinctive characteristics to the members of their own local or regional group which set them apart from other groups within the same country.

Thus, an encounter with an individual from another locality or region of the same country can also be analysed using the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. The analysis of such encounters may be used to help the learner reflect on the cross-locality and cross-regional variability which exists within countries, and to undermine national stereotypes. However, it is important to ensure that, when the Autobiography is employed in this way, the user does not merely construct new local or regional stereotypes to replace the national stereotypes. Instead, learners should be encouraged to reflect on the variability which actually occurs within any given locality or region by thinking about the individuality and unique characteristics of the other person they have encountered.

3.7 Supranational groups

In recent years, research has been conducted into the extent to which European people feel that they have a distinct European identity. This has revealed that some individuals do indeed identify with Europe, but that the strength of this identification varies considerably from one country to another. Developmentally, the strength of European identification often increases significantly through childhood and adolescence, although in some countries it still remains relatively unimportant in terms of individuals' self-conceptions when compared with other identifications (such as with the nation or with locale) even in late adolescence and indeed in adulthood. In addition, the meanings which individuals attribute to being European also vary from country to country. For example, the people living in some countries perceive a fundamental incompatibility between their national identity and European identity (so that the more they identify with their national group, the less they identify with being European), while people living in other countries perceive no incompatibility between their national and European identifications.

Although less well researched, individuals appear to think in terms of other supranational groups as well, drawing on categories such as African, Latin American and Asian in order to categorise people at the supranational level.

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters can therefore also be used when learners have encountered an individual from another supranational group. In such a context, the Autobiography can help the learner to reflect on the similarities and differences between people from different continents, and help them to reappraise the meanings which they associate with being European.

4

The **competences required** for interculturality

In order to engage in intercultural dialogue a number of intercultural competences are required. These competences are not acquired spontaneously by the developing individual. Instead, as the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue points out, they need to be explicitly taught and learned and then practised and maintained throughout life. The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters has been expressly designed to foster the development of these intercultural competences. It aims to equip individuals with the specific competences which are required to engage actively with people from other ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, and has been designed to encourage individuals to engage in subsequent actions which can help foster a deeper understanding of different cultural practices and world views. This section expands on these various intercultural competences which the Autobiography has been designed to support and foster.

The basis of intercultural competence is in the attitudes of the person interacting with people of another culture. This means a willingness to suspend one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and an ability to see how they might look from an outsider's perspective who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours. This can be called the ability to 'decentre'. If people do not have this respect for the way other people act and for what they believe, then there is no basis for successful communication and achievement of joint objectives.

Respect for otherness is manifested in curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend belief about (the 'naturalness' of) one's own culture and to believe in (the 'naturalness' of) other cultures.

Communication is often about creating a shared understanding about a topic, from the weather to the humour of a story, to what action to take next. Successful communication does not necessarily mean agreement or even compromise. Success means that each understands what the other wishes to say as fully as possible. So it is possible for people to understand each other and disagree, and it is also possible for people to agree but not realise that they have misunderstood each other.

Understanding other people from the same language and culture group as oneself is not easy and is perhaps never complete. It is far more difficult when speaking with someone from another culture, because they have:

- a different set of beliefs (what they assume is true, e.g. about what is classed as edible and inedible or what is thought polite behaviour);

- a different set of values (what they assume is important in their lives, e.g. they value honesty more than politeness, or they consider that older people's views are more valuable than those of the young);

- a different set of behaviours (the routine, often unconscious, ways of acting, e.g. they always avoid looking older people directly in the eyes or they always keep a fast at a given period in the year – whatever they 'always' do, without reflection).

A shared understanding is hindered by this because each starts from a different set of assumptions. Success depends on two things:

- being able to 'decentre' from one's own culture, that is, become aware of what is usually unconscious;

- being able to take the other person's perspective, and accepting that their ways also seem 'natural' to them.

This requires 'unlearning' what seems natural, and this requires a basic attitude of respect for otherness.

The first step in understanding others and being able to empathise with them is to acknowledge fully the identities they have. There might be a tendency to assimilate their identities to ones which we know, assuming for example that 'being a girl' is the same identity wherever one is, whereas this in fact differs from country to country and culture to culture or group to group.

Acknowledgement of identities is the ability to take full notice of other people's identities and to recognise them for what they are.

In interaction with people of other cultures, people often have concrete aims they wish to achieve, and in this case otherness is not only interesting but also a potential barrier. People who are 'tolerant of ambiguity' are able to meet this challenge and accept ambiguity, whilst finding a solution – and enjoying the experience of otherness.

Since members of other cultures have different ways of behaviour, have different standards and have different opinions, a lot of uncertainty and unpredictability emerges for an individual. The person who is acting in such an intercultural situation often does not know which behaviour is expected and how behaviour is evaluated. For instance, the temporal order of action or the division of labour in other cultures differ from those of one's own culture.

Tolerance for ambiguity means to be able to accept such uncertainties and ambiguities and to find solutions to problems which they might create. In contrast, persons with a low degree of tolerance for ambiguity experience unstructured and ambiguous situations as unpleasant and threatening. They either try to avoid such situations or to get out of them as soon as possible. If this is impossible, they feel visibly uncomfortable, misinterpret unclear situations and simplify ambiguities. When trying to solve such problems they often neglect a part of the problem and search for simple solutions. When confronted with contradictory and ambiguous opinions they search for a compromise and prefer a very clear and definite way of proceeding.

Tolerance for ambiguity is the ability to accept ambiguity and lack of clarity and to be able to deal with this constructively.

Although respect for otherness and tolerance for ambiguity are essential for successful interaction, they have to be complemented by the skills of taking up another perspective, of being able to grasp the ideas, feelings and intentions of other people. It is possible to accept and respect other people's beliefs, values and behaviours without grasping the impact this may have on their actions and the way they respond to our beliefs, values and behaviours.

People have to take into consideration in real situations that the same situation is often perceived and evaluated by people from different cultures in very different ways, and they have to be able to show empathy towards people from other cultures by applying the skills of changing perspective and showing real interest in what other people feel and how they perceive situations.

Empathy is the ability to project oneself into another person's perspective and their opinions, motives, ways of thinking and feelings. Empathetic persons are able to relate and respond in appropriate ways to the feelings, preferences and ways of thinking of others.

Empathetic persons have the skills to describe what others feel in certain situations. They observe others carefully, are able to notice emotions that are hardly made explicit and are able to understand them. They are able to see the relationship with their own feelings and thoughts, the similarities and differences, and to analyse the possible effects of different perspectives on the mutual understanding between themselves and their partners. In their own actions, they consider the perspectives of others and avoid hurting them.

People with low degrees of empathy cannot recognise and describe the feelings of other people. They are not interested in how other people think or feel and are thus unable to detect when others do not feel at ease in a certain situation. They cannot emulate the way others think and how they perceive a situation. They cannot imagine how their own behaviour could impact others, and thus from time to time they hurt other people's feelings and are unsuccessful in intercultural communication.

Problems in intercultural communication often occur because the communication partners follow different linguistic conventions. People from different cultures associate different meanings with specific terms; they express their intentions in different linguistic forms, they follow different cultural conventions of how a conversation should take place with regard to its content or its structure. The meaning of gestures, mime, volume, pauses, etc. also differs from one culture to the other.

This is all exacerbated by the use of foreign languages, when people are often not able to formulate or interpret intentions appropriately in given contexts.

People often do not notice such problems but when they do, they make 'psychological' assumptions, and attribute the differences to different character traits, to different 'cultural mentalities'. A speaker who speaks with a low voice, for instance, is often described as 'shy', although he / she may only want to behave in a polite manner or to indicate that the message is very important.

Communicative awareness: an ability to recognise different linguistic conventions, different verbal and non-verbal communication conventions – especially in a foreign language – and their effects on discourse processes, and to negotiate rules appropriate for intercultural communication.

Another crucial factor is knowledge, not primarily knowledge about a specific culture, but rather knowledge of how social groups and social identities function, both one's own and others. If it can be anticipated with whom one will interact, then knowledge of that person's world is useful.

Knowledge has two major components: knowledge of social processes, and knowledge of illustrations of those processes and products; the latter includes knowledge about how other people see oneself as well as some knowledge about other people.

It is not possible to have or anticipate all the knowledge which might at some point be needed. There are, however, skills which are just as important as attitudes and knowledge. Because people need to be able to see how misunderstandings can arise and how they might be able to resolve them, they need the attitudes of decentring but also the skills of comparing. By putting ideas, events, documents side by side and seeing how each might look from the other perspective, one can see how people might misunderstand what is said or written or done by someone with a different social identity. The skills of comparison, of interpreting and relating, are therefore crucial.

Skills of interpreting and relating: the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.

Furthermore, because nobody can anticipate all their knowledge needs, it is equally important to acquire the skills of finding out new knowledge and integrating it with what they already have. People especially need to know how to ask people from other cultures about their beliefs, values and behaviours which, because they are often unconscious, those people cannot easily explain. So intercultural speakers/mediators need skills of discovery and interaction.

Skills of discovery and interaction are the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

However open towards, curious about and tolerant of other people's beliefs, values and behaviours one is, one's own beliefs, values and behaviours are deeply embedded and can create reaction and rejection. Because of this unavoidable response, people need to become aware of their own values and how these influence their views of other people's values. They

need a critical awareness of themselves and their values, as well as those of other people.

Critical cultural awareness: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

It is important to make one's values explicit and conscious in any evaluative response to others. There is nonetheless a fundamental values position which has to be accepted, a position which acknowledges respect for human dignity and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction.

Education for democratic citizenship emphasises the importance of education leading not only to analysis and reflection but also to taking action. Action can be of many forms, for example:

- grasp and take seriously the opinions and arguments of others, accord personal recognition to people of other opinions, put oneself in the situation of others, accept criticism, listen

- make one's own opinions (needs, interests, feelings, values) clear, speak coherently, give clear and transparent reasons

- organise group work, co-operate in the distribution of work, accept tasks, demonstrate trustworthiness, tenacity, care and conscientiousness

- tolerate variety, divergence, difference, recognise conflicts, find harmony where possible, regulate issues in socially acceptable fashion, accept mistakes and differences

- find compromises, seek consensus, accept majority decisions, tolerate minorities, promote encouragement, weigh rights and responsibilities, and show trust and courage

- emphasise group responsibility, develop fair norms and common interests and needs, promote common approaches to tasks

Action orientation is the willingness to undertake some activity alone or with others as a consequence of reflection with the aim of making a contribution to the common good.

5 Conclusions

This paper has described the policy context within which the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters has been developed, the concepts which have guided its construction, and the social-scientific theories from which those concepts have been derived.

As noted at the outset, the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue argues that the intercultural approach offers a new way of managing cultural diversity based on shared values and respect for common heritage, cultural diversity and human dignity. Intercultural dialogue has a vital role to play in preventing ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides and in promoting social cohesion. However, as the White Paper also emphasises, the competences which are required for intercultural dialogue are not automatically acquired: they need to be learned, practised and maintained throughout life. The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters is an educational tool which has been expressly designed to foster and support the development of these required intercultural competences in younger and older learners alike.

The current paper has explored many of the key concepts which underpin the Autobiography, including *culture, multiperspectivity, multicultural society, plurality, pluriculturality, interculturality, plurilingualism* and *intercultural citizenship*. In addition, it has examined findings from recent research into the development of attitudes to people from other cultural groups, and the ways in which people manage their multiple identifications when encountering people from other cultures. This paper has also explored the nature of the different boundaries which may be crossed in the course of an intercultural encounter, including *ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial, national, local, regional* and *supra-national* boundaries. Finally, this paper has described the *attitudinal, affective, cognitive* and *behavioural* competences which are required to engage in effective intercultural dialogue. These are the specific intercultural competences which the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters has been designed to support and foster.

The intention is that the Autobiography will be used in a range of different contexts, including formal educational settings at all levels as well as the private setting of the home. Through its use in these various settings, it is hoped that the Autobiography will make a significant contribution to nurturing, fostering and supporting the development of the intercultural competences which are required for effective intercultural dialogue.

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