

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 1

Activity 3: The *Who I am* section of the AIE

Commentary

There is a lot in common between the ways these people have chosen to define themselves. All three, Anna, Imad and Rayya, mention their age and their gender. They also foreground the urban, regional or national background they come from. Imad and Rayya talk about their respective roles in the family – Imad is the youngest of three brothers, while Rayya is the elder sister in her family. Brief as her description is, Anna indicates religious belonging as a member of the Catholic church.

A particularly active identification for Rayya is her membership in the group of secondary school pupils. Important for her, and also for Anna, are their language identities: Rayya is learning three foreign languages – English, Russian and German; Anna speaks four languages – Flemish, Dutch, French and English – although in Anna's case it's less clear whether these are foreign or native languages. Rayya enjoys drawing and is good at arts. She loves having fun and is keen on film – personal attributes and hobbies which are obviously salient for her, as she chooses to mention them as part of her self-concept. Anna seems to identify more with her profession. Imad, on the other hand, highlights his aspirations – he wants to make a difference!

A key aim of the AIE is to facilitate participants in using the intercultural encounters they have experienced to reflect on their own identifications. When somebody meets a member of another cultural group and critically reflects on that experience, this can initiate a process of self-examination and awareness of belonging to a group. As a consequence, intercultural encounters can result in change not only in attitudes towards the cultural group of the person encountered but also in attitudes towards one's own group(s). This critical reappraisal may even lead to changes in identification.