

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 5

Activity 3: Evidence of competences

Alice's AIE Section 4: The other person's feelings - commentary

Section 4 of the AIE has been designed to support the development of the following intercultural competences: **respect for otherness**, **empathy** and **tolerance of ambiguity**.

By guiding the user to describe and reflect on those specific aspects of their attitudes and behaviour during the encounter, but without explicitly naming them, the questions and prompts in this section draw the user's attention to their significance. Learning is stimulated through assisting the user to remember and verbalise behaviour that gives evidence (or not) of the competences in question.

In Alice's account we discover her inclination to note the behaviour of the other participants in the interaction. For example, she noticed Peter's nervousness and anxiety, as well as his mother's guarded behaviour. She manages to 'decentre' from what she knows are her own strengths – being curious and open to others – and accepts the possibility that they may not be immediately recognised by the other people involved. With **respect**, she acknowledges the validity of Peter's and his mother's 'testing the waters first' and being careful before taking the next 'big' step in this new relationship.

There is also evidence for Alice acting **empathetically**. She ponders on various aspects of her boyfriend's identity in his family's current situation: "It is hard to be a refugee and come to a strange country where everything is different." Alice imagines their thoughts and feelings and manages to adopt their perspective, but at the same time she is clear about what she finds difficult to agree with: "... later on she [Peter's mother] often mentioned how I was not like other Swedes, mentioned as something positive, which I at the time and later have had problems with being okay with."

Furthermore, Alice is aware of the uncertainty of her interpretations. Acknowledging her 'outsider' identity she notes: "I am guessing she might have felt protective. Over her son, herself, her house, her culture, everything, since I was sort of an outsider coming in, and coming in through such a personal gateway." She **accepts the ambiguity** of the emerging relationships and, instead of seeking an escape route, she enjoys Maria's pleasantness and chooses to emphasise her own openness.