

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 6

Activity 3: Addressing problematic AIE stories

Commentary

Story 1: Fear of the unknown

The girl's teacher might decide to use several strategies to help her develop her awareness and become a more skilled intercultural communicator. One possible strategy is to ask the girl to pick out any 'strong' words in her AIE and think about why she had chosen to use them. This language analysis exercise may lead her to realise that she had perhaps exaggerated the drama of the situation. By reflecting on the language she had used, she would probably find her response to the situation rather emotional and not based on any evidence for risk. It was her imagination that prompted her to react in the way she did. By acknowledging her subjectivity and applying her imaginative power, she could then put herself in the situation of her hosts and picture how the father and his two children had felt. She would probably discover that her 'odd' way of looking at them and hiding in her bedroom had puzzled them and made them wonder what was wrong. Empathising with them would help her consider whether and how she could make amends, by writing a note of thanks, for example, and thus renew communication.

Story 2: Pride and prejudice

This particular encounter was not an experience the author of the AIE was satisfied with. One strategy that will help her enjoy intercultural situations more is developing her skills of discovery to inform her knowledge about the people she interacts with. Getting to know her colleague and his family background better and seeking to learn about the cultural etiquettes and traditions he follows would make it possible for her to suspend quick judgments and understand his actions and what he said in a different light. Another useful strategy she may want to adopt is the practice of self-assessment. If she asked herself the question: "Have I shown intolerance and perhaps rudeness in this encounter?" she would certainly answer it in the positive. And then, finally, she could go back to her description and reflection on the incident and re-imagine the encounter. In her mind, she could picture different feelings, say different words and note how her colleague's reactions change accordingly.