

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS CONTEXT, CONCEPTS AND THEORIES



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The first edition of the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters* (AIE) was published by the Education Department of the Council of Europe in 2009. It was a concrete response to the recommendation made by the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity", which recommended that new educational tools should be developed to encourage learners to reflect critically on their own responses and attitudes to experiences of other cultures.

The reference for the first edition is:

Byram M., Barrett M., Ipgrave J., Jackson R. and Méndez García M.C. (2009), *Autobiography of intercultural encounters*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, France.

The AIE has since been complemented by two further tools, the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters through visual media* (AIEVM) and the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters through the internet* (AIETI).

The current volume contains updated and revised versions of two supporting documents which accompanied the original AIE. The scope of these documents has been broadened to encompass all three autobiographies and to align them with the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (www.coe.int/competences) which was published in 2018.

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Introduction

The AIE is a set of resources designed to encourage people to think about and learn from intercultural encounters they have had either face to face, through visual media such as television, magazines and films, or through the internet.

There are three separate but parallel tools:

- ▶ the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters* (AIE);
- ▶ the *Autobiography of Intercultural encounters through visual media* (AIEVM);
- ▶ the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters through the internet* (AIETI).

All three tools come in two versions:

- ▶ a “Standard version” – for use by older learners and adults;
- ▶ a “Version for younger learners” – for use by children who need help from an adult in reading and writing and in thinking back over their encounter.

The focus of all three autobiographies is on intercultural encounters that have made a strong impression or had a long-lasting effect on the people who use them. In discovering what underlies these encounters, users become more aware of their experiences and reflect on their reactions, thereby developing their intercultural competences.

Revised and updated editions of all three autobiographies can be found in three separate volumes which accompany the present volume. The present volume instead contains two accompanying papers, entitled “Context, concepts and theories” and “Concepts for discussion”.

“Context, concepts and theories” discusses the policy context and the theoretical and conceptual background to the three autobiographies. It is intended for readers who wish to understand the ideas that underlie the design of the autobiographies.

“Concepts for discussion” provides less technical discussions of some of the key concepts underlying the autobiographies. It is intended for use with young people in the final years of school education or the early years of higher education, to enable them to engage with key concepts related to culture, identity and cultural interaction.

Context, concepts and theories

1. The policy context of the Autobiography of intercultural encounters

Education policy is an integral element of social policy, not least because of its contribution to social inclusion. Education policy is also central to economic policy, due to the fact that education systems enhance human capital. These views have been expressed at state level in many parts of the world and at supra-national level by the Council of Europe and the European Union, although by its very nature the Council of Europe pays more attention to social than to economic policy, for example in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008), which is a fundamental document for the construction of the AIE.

A particular focus in the White Paper is on promoting social cohesion through interculturality and intercultural dialogue. 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. (Council of Europe 2008: paragraph 24)

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

The learning and teaching of intercultural competence is essential for democratic culture and social cohesion. (Ibid: paragraph 151)

The AIE is one instrument for promoting and enhancing intercultural competence.

The need to promote social cohesion within a society is not a new concern, but the increase in migration and mobility in recent years has created new minority social groups within states which hitherto considered themselves to be homogeneous, albeit with only limited justification since minorities are not a new phenomenon. Both old and new minority social groups are often vulnerable because they lack social status, and the Council of Europe is particularly concerned to ensure the social inclusion of vulnerable groups of all kinds in contemporary societies including, in particular, migrant or immigrant groups.

The Council of Europe's Warsaw Declaration of 2005 – entitled "Building a more humane and inclusive Europe" – anticipated the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and listed some examples of activities which could be used to enhance social cohesion. These include:

- ▶ co-operation and networking in the field of education and student exchanges at all levels;
- ▶ relevant intercultural programmes and exchanges at secondary school level, both within Europe and with neighbouring countries;
- ▶ empowering young people to participate actively in democratic processes so that they can contribute to the promotion of core values.

The first edition of the AIE, which was published in 2009, was designed for use in all of these types of activities. It was constructed specifically to help participants analyse and reflect on their participation in intercultural encounters of any kind, and to foster relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes in the process.

The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue had noted the importance of learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes and put particular emphasis on the capacity for reflection and the self-critical disposition necessary for life in culturally diverse societies (see paragraph 94). The inclusion of reflection on personal development through an intercultural experience and, secondly, on the values, beliefs and behaviours of all involved, is a crucial element of the AIE.

The AIE was also designed to promote the development of the competences and identities of intercultural citizens in a multilingual and multicultural world, in accordance with the vision laid out in the White Paper. An intercultural citizen has, firstly, the competences of active citizenship needed in a community, whether local,

regional, national, continental (for example European or Asian) or global. An intercultural citizen also has the values, attitudes, knowledge, critical understanding 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. Thus, the AIE was designed to promote not only intercultural competence but also intercultural citizenship in its users.

The White Paper noted that the competences necessary for intercultural dialogue are not automatically acquired. They need to be learned, and practised and maintained throughout life, and all providers of education – working in all institutional contexts and at all levels of education – can play a crucial role here (section 4.3). The White Paper identified democratic citizenship, language and history as key disciplinary or subject areas where intercultural competences can be promoted. Education about diversity in religious and other beliefs – to be distinguished from religious education – can also contribute to intercultural competence and citizenship. Indeed, interreligious dialogue is recognised in the White Paper as an important dimension of intercultural dialogue.

A new policy initiative

The Council of Europe has pursued the enhancement of teaching and learning in the four areas of democratic citizenship, language, history and religion in numerous projects over many years. However, these projects have not always been linked into a coherent whole and the intercultural dimension has not always been prominent. This problem was noted by the member state of Andorra when it held the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe in 2012-13. Andorra made education the priority of its political and policy programme, and it placed, at the core of this programme, the issue of how education may be used to create the conditions required for living peacefully together with others in culturally diverse, democratic societies. In particular, Andorra proposed that a common reference framework including both democratic and intercultural competences should be developed. Such a framework would enable teaching and learning in all relevant subject areas to be harnessed in a more coherent manner in pursuit of the overarching goal of fostering a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue in the member states.

There was strong political support from the member states for the Andorran initiative and, as a result, the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) was developed and published by the Council of Europe in three volumes in 2018. The RFCDC provides a comprehensive description of the intercultural and democratic competences that an individual needs to acquire through education in order to:

- ▶ promote and protect human rights;
- ▶ act as a responsible democratic citizen;
- ▶ comprehend and appreciate the perspectives and world views of those who have different cultural affiliations from themselves;
- ▶ engage in respectful intercultural dialogue.

The RFCDC offers a unified and comprehensive conceptual framework which can be used to guide teaching and learning in all of the key education areas that can contribute to the attainment of these four goals, including democratic citizenship, language, history and religion. The RFCDC also contains detailed guidance on how curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, a whole-school approach and teacher education can all be optimally harnessed in order to achieve these goals, as well as on the significance of language in learning intercultural and democratic competences, how the RFCDC can be applied in higher education and how it can be used to build learners' resilience to radicalisation.

In the wake of the publication of the RFCDC, it was decided to prepare a second edition of the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters*, in order to align it with the terminology used in the RFCDC. The intention is for this second edition of the *Autobiography* to form part of the large set of materials that may be used by member states to implement the RFCDC within their education systems.

2. Concepts and theories underlying the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters*

As noted above, it is 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

Culture itself is a notoriously difficult term to define and describe. This is because social groups and their cultures are always internally heterogeneous and embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often contested, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways.

Social groups and their cultures

Distinctions can be drawn between the material, social and subjective aspects of culture. Material culture consists of the physical artefacts which are commonly used by the members of a cultural group (for example the tools, goods, clothing). Social culture consists of the social institutions of the group (for example its language(s), religion(s), laws, rules of social conduct, folklore, cultural icons). Subjective culture consists of the beliefs, norms, collective memories, attitudes, values, discourses and practices which group members commonly use as a frame of reference for thinking about, making sense of and relating to the world. Culture itself is a composite formed from all three aspects – it consists of a network of material, social and subjective resources and experiences. The total set of cultural resources is distributed across an entire group, but each individual member of a group appropriates and uses only a subset of the total set of cultural resources potentially available to them.

Defining “culture” in this way means that groups of any size may have their own distinctive cultures. This includes families, generational groups, neighbourhoods, nations, sexual orientation groups, ethnic groups, cities, work organisations, occupational groups, sports groups and disability groups, for example. For this reason, all people belong simultaneously to and identify with many different groups and their cultures.

Variability within cultures

Variability within the cultures of groups is created by the fact that the material, social and subjective resources which are perceived to be associated with membership of the group are often contested by different individuals and subgroups within it. In addition, even the boundaries of the group itself – and who is perceived to be within the group and outside the group – may be contested by different group members. Social group boundaries are often very fuzzy.

This internal variability and fuzziness are, in part, a consequence of the fact that all people belong to and identify with multiple groups and their cultures but participate in different constellations of groups, so that the ways in which they relate to any one group and its culture depends, at least in part, on the points of view which are held by the other groups and cultures in which they also participate. In other words, cultural affiliations intersect in such a way that each person occupies a unique cultural positioning. Furthermore, the meanings and feelings which people attach to the particular cultures in which they participate are personalised according to their own life histories, personal experiences and individual personalities.

It should be noted that while cultural identities, which are derived from people’s memberships of cultural groups, usually form a very significant and salient component of their self-concept, these are not the only identities that people may hold. They might also use their personal attributes (for example shy, studious, fun-loving), interpersonal relationships and roles (for example mother, friend, colleague) and autobiographical narratives about their lives (for example born in London to middle class parents, educated at a state school) to define themselves and their own uniqueness further. All of these multiple identifications with different cultural groups, attributes, relationships, roles and narratives help them to define, position and orientate themselves within the social world relative to other people.

That said, it is people’s cultural affiliations that are of particular relevance to intercultural encounters. These affiliations are fluid and dynamic and, as a consequence, the salience of cultural identities fluctuates as people move from one situation to another. Different affiliations – or different clusters of intersecting affiliations – become salient (and are presented by the individual and noticed by those with whom they are interacting) depending on the particular social context encountered. Fluctuations in the salience of cultural affiliations and identities are also linked to the changes which occur to people’s interests, needs, goals and expectations as they move across situations and through time.

Furthermore, cultures change over time. Change happens as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from other groups and their cultures. Cultures also change over time because their own members contest the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group. If, in the process of contestation, meanings, values or practices emerge which are sufficiently novel and then become “fashionable” or attractive to other people within the group, these novel constructions may in turn contribute to the total pool of cultural resources available to group members and therefore change the culture itself in the process.

Cultures – and the languages associated with them – can therefore be analysed both diachronically and synchronically. The changes in the culture of a social group – and the make-up of the group itself – can be analysed historically. It is also possible to analyse the group and its culture at a given point in time, usually contemporaneous with the analysis. This can be useful for teaching purposes for example.

Individuals and cultures

The ways in which individuals relate to the cultures to which they are affiliated are complex. Because cultural participation and cultural interactions are context-dependent and variable, individuals use the multiple cultural resources which are available to them in a fluid manner to actively construct and negotiate their own meanings and interpretations of the world across the various contexts which they encounter in their everyday lives. However, cultures also constrain and limit the thoughts and actions of individuals. Cultural affiliations influence not only how people perceive themselves and their own identities, but also how they perceive others and how they perceive the relationships between groups.

In addition to the cultural identities which people subjectively use to describe themselves – “self-ascriptions” – further cultural identities may be ascribed to them by other people. However, these ascribed identities – “other-ascriptions” – which are often based upon visible characteristics such as ethnicity, gender or dress, may not be identities to which individuals themselves attach any importance. The inappropriate ascription of identities by others and the experience of discrepancies between one’s own preferred identities and other people’s perceptions of oneself have been found to have adverse effects on people’s psychological well-being and social adaptation.

In short, all individuals participate in multiple cultures and all cultures are internally variable, diverse and heterogeneous. Cultural affiliations are personalised and people’s multiple cultural affiliations interact and intersect with each other. The way people participate in their cultures is often context-dependent and fluid, and all cultures are constantly evolving and changing. They can be analysed both diachronically and synchronically. Cultural affiliations not only enable but also constrain people’s thoughts, feelings and actions. Finally, people’s sense of well-being and social functioning can be adversely affected if others ascribe inappropriate identities to them.

2.2. Cultural discourse

Research by social scientists has revealed that, in people’s everyday discourse about culture and the cultures of groups, 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 essentialised 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 and it is often linked to a reified and reductive view of ethnicity and religion. Such views provide simplistic criteria for judging whether someone is “truly” Polish, French, Greek or other nationality. 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 politicians, the media, extremist groups, some academic traditions and sometimes by cultural communities themselves.

Dominant discourse can be distinguished from “demotic discourse”, which is often used when people from different backgrounds discuss issues of common concern or engage 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. In demotic discourse, culture is a dynamic process through which meanings shared by groups or communities, as well as 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 personal choice depending on the needs of the individual and the circumstances.

2.3. Multicultural societies

In the context of this paper, the term “multicultural society” is used to denote a society which is culturally diverse either as a consequence of the immigration of people who have been born and raised in other societies and who have brought elements of their heritage culture to the new society in which they have

settled, or as a consequence of the presence of multiple indigenous national or ethnic groups living within that society. The term as used here does not imply that any one of the groups is more important than others. (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 research shows that this idea of a multicultural society does not correspond to real life experience. Not only are the boundaries between groups unclear and fuzzy, but minority cultures, religions and ethnicities are themselves internally plural, and the symbols and values of their various constituent groups are open to negotiation, contest and change.

Moreover, individuals from any background may choose to 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. 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 – as in the AIE – of intercultural encounters or exchanges is one such strategy to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

2.4. Plurality

All European societies – and many others in other continents – 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 most if not all societies, usually resulting from the immigration of peoples from other cultural backgrounds or 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 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, or vice versa. Others might synthesise beliefs and values from many different cultural sources. Alternatively, individuals might describe themselves as being from a particular cultural tradition but might have ceased to hold some of the beliefs that are frequently associated with that tradition. 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. 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, for when studied empirically, cultures can be seen to encompass a variety of beliefs, practices and expressions. 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 groups and their cultures. 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. Insofar as everyone participates in multiple cultures (see section 2.1 above), all people are pluricultural in practice. However, ethnic minority individuals are often perceived to be pluricultural because they have to negotiate not only aspects of their ethnic heritage culture but also aspects of the dominant majority culture in which they live, as well as the contrasts and contradictions which may exist between minority and majority.

Members of the majority group are not so obviously pluricultural, despite their participation in multiple cultures (for example in national, occupational, generational and family cultures).

Studies of ethnic minority individuals indicate that there are positive benefits to actively embracing and accepting the multiple cultures in which one participates (as opposed to denying or rejecting one or more of those cultures). For example, ethnic minority individuals who adopt an explicitly pluricultural orientation towards both their ethnic heritage and the majority culture are better adapted psychologically and socioculturally than those who orientate only to their ethnic heritage culture or to the majority culture. Individuals with a pluricultural orientation 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.

Pluriculturalism can be expressed in a number of different ways. Some individuals might choose to affirm their multiple cultural allegiances simultaneously, irrespective of context. For example, young people born to parents who have different cultural backgrounds often maintain a simultaneous allegiance to the distinctive cultural heritages of both parents. However, many pluricultural individuals commonly engage in what has been called “alternation”. For example, minority youth whose ethnic culture is very distinct from the prevailing majority peer culture frequently adopt ethnic values and practices within the family home but switch to the majority peer culture when they are out with their friends and then switch again to the institutional culture when they are at school. Young people can be highly skilled at navigating and negotiating different cultures across different contexts and life domains. A third way in which pluriculturalism 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

“Pluriculturalism” needs to be distinguished from “interculturality” as used in the context of this paper. Pluriculturalism 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 cultures 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. 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 competences, as described in the RFCDC. These include values (for example valuing human dignity and valuing cultural diversity), attitudes (such as openness and respect), skills (for example skills of listening and observing, linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, and flexibility and adaptability), and knowledge and critical understanding (for example, knowledge and critical understanding of other cultural groups and their products and practices, and of the ways in which people of different cultures interact). Autonomous learning skills (which include the ability to search out and acquire new knowledge about a culture and its practices and products) and analytical and critical thinking skills (which include the ability to interpret a practice from another culture and relate it to practices within one’s own, and the ability to evaluate critically the practices and products of one’s own and other cultures) are particularly important for interculturality. 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 something which we do not agree with 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. As such, tolerance (in this restricted sense of the word) may be experienced as a highly negative attitude by those who are being “tolerated”. In addition to being an individual attitude, tolerance can be a guiding principle for state relations regarding cultural diversity, whereby a 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 of “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 or them. 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 and positively valuing “the other” and their differences, thus reducing the need for toleration (in the above sense).

Approaching “other” ways of life, and those who practise them, with respect can be seen as a step in the direction of “interculturality”, and respect is indeed a necessary prerequisite 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 cultural backgrounds and heritage. Such dialogue is based on 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 the individual as being developed through meeting “otherness”. As such, intercultural dialogue is an important tool for achieving mutual understanding and social cohesion within multicultural societies and for fostering a sense of inclusion in which no individual or group is marginalised or defined as outsiders.

However, it is important to note that respect and intercultural dialogue do not require one to regard all cultures, practices and beliefs as equally relevant or valid for oneself. Rather, they are based on the fact that one approaches other people, groups and practices with a certain world view and identities of one’s own, although these might change and develop through encounters and exchanges with others from different backgrounds. Respect and intercultural dialogue therefore do not imply indifference, relativism (the idea that contrary beliefs from different religious or cultural settings are equally valid) or syncretism (the combination of different forms of belief). However, effective and respectful intercultural dialogue does require the acquisition of intercultural competences, including openness, empathy and the ability to see oneself, situations and events from the perspectives of cultural “others”.

2.8. Views of people from other cultures

A conceptual distinction may be drawn between a “stereotype” on the one hand and “prejudice” on the other. A stereotype is a simplified over-generalisation about the characteristics of the people who belong to a particular group. Categorisations are useful but become problematic when over-generalised and linked to evaluations of a group, whether positive or negative. Prejudice is an organised predisposition to respond to individuals on the basis of their social group memberships – and the stereotypes used to allocate them to a group – 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-judgment”), but the common use of the term restricts it to negative predispositions towards groups of people.

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, but is often linked to prejudice.

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.

Studies into the development of stereotyping and prejudice have revealed that children and young people exhibit a diversity of different developmental profiles. For example, sometimes their stereotypes of people from other ethnic and national groups, and their feelings towards these people, become more negative 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 there

are no changes in evaluations of, and feelings towards, people from other cultures with increasing age. A similar diversity of profiles has been found in the development of stereotypes of, and feelings about, one's own ethnic and national groups. And perhaps rather curiously, children's and young people's stereotypes and evaluations of cultural groups do not always show a clear relationship to their actual friendships and patterns of discrimination.

Although children and young people 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, people may hold much more positive stereotypes about other cultural groups than they do about their own group. That said, learners do usually exhibit ingroup favouritism when they are asked how they feel about and how much they like various cultural groups including their own.

2.9. 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 learners acquire towards other cultural groups, with those who use multiple languages tending to be less ethnocentric in their attitudes. In addition, the contents of the school curriculum, especially curriculum coverage of issues relating to racism and discrimination, can influence learners' attitudes to other groups. For this reason, there are educational programmes which have been developed to teach learners about other cultural groups in order to reduce levels of prejudice.

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. In addition, the internet engages individuals in globalised spaces where they are also exposed to a wide range of intercultural contents (texts, pictures, music, videos, etc.) that can influence their attitudes.

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 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. Yet, 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 for successfully completing the task);
- ▶ when, in the course of the interaction, they find out things about each other (for example about each other's cultural practices);
- ▶ when the stereotype of the outgroup is disconfirmed during the course of the interaction (that is, when the person from the other group is not a "typical" member of that group);
- ▶ when there is 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, research has emphasised the role of socialisation factors (such as the family, the school, the mass media, the internet and intercultural contact) in how intercultural attitudes emerge and develop.

However, cognitive skills and competences are also linked to the development of intercultural attitudes. There is clear evidence that 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. Learners who are high on these two cognitive skills have been found to be less prejudiced towards other people than those who are low on these skills.

The AIE 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.

Three volumes of the AIE have been developed. The first volume, the AIE, achieves these goals by supporting learners in reflecting on face-to-face intercultural encounters which they have experienced. The second volume, the AIEVM, has been developed to support learners in reflecting on intercultural encounters that have taken place through visual media (such as television, cinema and photographs), while the third volume, the AIETI, supports learners in reflecting on intercultural encounters that have taken place in online communication through the internet. As said above, personal face-to-face contact, visual media and the internet are all significant influences on attitudes to people from other cultural groups. The three volumes of the AIE assist learners to understand and critically evaluate these important sources of influence and their own reactions to them.

2.10. Multiple identities and the impact of intercultural encounters

Individuals are simultaneously members of a large number of different cultural and social groups (such as national groups, racial groups, religious groups, gender groups). When membership of a particular group comes to form a salient part of an individual's self-concept, such that they attribute 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 group. In addition, as we noted earlier in this paper (see section 2.1), people frequently use their personal attributes, interpersonal relationships, social roles and autobiographical narratives as further components of their self-concepts. These multiple identifications with groups, attributes, relationships, roles and narratives enable individuals to orientate and position themselves when they interact with other people. The term "identification" is used here (rather than "identity") to capture the notion that identifications are active psychological processes (rather than reified entities which individuals possess).

Identity theorists emphasise that the various identifications which a person holds interact with each other in driving that person's perceptions, values, attitudes, judgments 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 French, white, male, middle class Christian associates with being French will be very different from those which a French, female, working class Muslim of North African heritage 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.

Furthermore, multiple identifications are never all activated simultaneously. Instead, the subjective salience of any particular identification fluctuates and changes in a dynamic 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 in every context. It is when confronted with "difference" of one kind or another that identifications can become very salient (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 AIE is to encourage and facilitate 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 AIE 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.

2.11. 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 most often they are 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, shared myths of common ancestry, and shared symbols, traditions and practices (which often but not always include a common language). It 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. Thirdly, there are nations some of whose members live in one state and some in others. 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 contain members of minority groups who are not perceived as indigenous either by others or themselves, and 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 relatively recent past. "Indigenous" groups are perceived to have been "always" present in a territory. Individuals from recently migrated groups may share the same state citizenship as indigenous majority and minority national groups whilst having a different identity from both.

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, "pure" 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 motivate popular nationalistic movements in many states, where a drive for "purity" leads to "ethnic cleansing".

Given these conceptual distinctions, it is more accurate to reserve the terms "nationality" and "national identity" to refer to the sense of belonging to and identification with 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. In democratic societies, 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 welfare state services.

Obligations within democratic states include respect for the law, respect for the rights of others and ensuring that those that 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. Education for active citizenship may include encouraging civic or political activity during the period of education and not just preparation for the future. One approach to this is “service learning”, where learners undertake service activity that benefits the community beyond the school, after which they are required to reflect critically on their service activity in order to achieve new learning outcomes.

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, supra-national 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 therefore includes both conventional activities relating to electoral processes (for example voting, election campaigning) and non-conventional activities which take place outside the electoral process (for example signing petitions, writing letters to politicians, participating in political demonstrations). 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 (for example boycotting or preferentially buying particular goods or services).

There is evidence that many young people are now engaging to a greater extent in 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 (for example 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 or refugees), who are excluded from conventional political participation, may nevertheless be highly active citizens within these alternative arenas.

Changes to the concept of citizenship within Europe

In recent decades, Europe has begun to undergo important 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 that this legal status will also become an additional identity, a sense of belonging to Europe, and the Council of Europe holds a similar position of encouraging the development in Europeans of a European identity.

For its part, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in promoting global citizenship education and international understanding, is envisaging some of these approaches on a world scale, separating citizenship still further from institutional underpinning. At this point, citizenship may appear to be based more on civil and social values than on political ones. It must therefore be acknowledged that the scope of the exercise of citizenship and the arrangements for it need to change radically.

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe place particular emphasis on language learning and language use as a means of fostering a sense of European belonging. The European Union suggests that people learn at least two other European languages in addition to their own. The Council of Europe argues that being plurilingual will be a significant indicator of being European.

2.12. Plurilingualism

The AIE 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 face-to-face 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 or discourses 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 also seen as a means to gain access to the European cultural heritage and as a marker of a European identity. 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: 168)

Plurilingualism is the individual’s ability to communicate in two or more languages or varieties, 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 domains of life, and not others. That competence will 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, and 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 use 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 multilingual context, with combinations from different varieties being a common phenomenon as salience of cultural identifications shifts and changes. Use of different languages and varieties and shifts between them are a means of marking different cultural identifications.

Plurilingualism acknowledges the importance of “intercomprehension”, the use of one language to understand others. This is possible through the phenomenon of language “families”, that is, 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 and strategies, speakers of languages 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 therefore be one of the keys to the development of access to European linguistic and cultural diversities and is thus of political, social and economic significance. Education for intercomprehension can also contribute towards learners’ motivation and autonomy, creating opportunities for intercultural education.

2.13. Languages and social, political and economic inclusion

Given the diversity of languages in Europe, democratic citizenship as a participatory activity rests, to a large extent, on plurilingual competence as a prerequisite for the practice of democratic citizenship in multicultural and multilingual arenas. 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 one aspect 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 understood as identification with a state, 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 such 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 supra-national or European citizenship and to extend individuals' horizons provided that they do not feel their local and national identities are 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. *From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education – Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe (Executive version)* recognises the need to analyse 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. (Council of Europe 2007: 20)

Modern technology, international contacts among individuals and economic globalisation have created an unprecedented need for a global language, which is, and will probably continue to 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 becomes more conflictual 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 largely unquestioned. 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, simultaneously, an awareness of the limitations of any lingua franca to convey subtleties of culture-specific meanings, as otherwise there may be damage to democratic participation and devaluation of linguistic diversity.

2.14. 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 among 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 cultures 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 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, cultural groups and individuals 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 and mutual understanding, these being the only means of ensuring that intercultural citizenship is not just an attractive but an attainable ideal.

2.15. 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 – and engagement in citizenship activities which surpass frontiers of states 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 the aims and purposes of foreign language education and those of 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 – taking its purposes from foreign language education – 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 which involve multicultural communities, including the local, regional, national and transnational level.

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 and beyond. The development of plurilingual competence should go hand in hand with the development of intercultural competence since the latter promotes appropriate knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes for interaction with people of other social groups and cultures. Together, they have the potential to create transcultural communities of communication in multicultural areas, whether local or transnational.

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. All three volumes of the AIE can be used to foster intercultural understanding and reflection on what action its users might take as citizens as a consequence of their reflections on an encounter.

2.16. History and culture

As stated previously, changes in the culture of a social group – and the make-up of the group itself – can be analysed historically. The analysis of a specific group and its culture at a given point in time is critical in any historical study, as it clarifies the context in which the group lived. In more technical terms, historical context refers to the social, religious, economic and political conditions that existed at a certain time and place.

Because a culture relates to a group of individuals, with all its dynamic variations and subgroups, and because history investigates and analyses facts, events, individuals or groups that occurred in the past within a specific cultural context, it is clear that without understanding the complex dynamics of the historical context, it is not possible to critically understand the influence of the time and place in which facts and events took place or in which groups or individuals lived. Thus, the relationship between history and culture is intrinsic because studying the diversity of human experience over time helps learners both to recognise cultures as meaningful products of specific times and places, and to appreciate their works of art, literature, music and dance, for example.

Unsurprisingly, history education contributes to the development of intercultural competence by providing insights into how people who lived in the past behaved and interacted and, for that very reason, demonstrates that the history of humankind is one where cultures have communicated whenever different communities have come into contact and developed relations.

The learning of history is a more difficult and complex enterprise than previously thought. It involves the acquisition and use of a set of domain-specific cognitive strategies, by which the past is learned and understood, a process termed “historical thinking”, grounded on the notion that history is for the most part an interpretative discipline. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that learners study history in order to learn about and understand the world they live in and the forces, movements and events that have shaped it. History education in schools should help learners understand the processes of change over time and, importantly, how these processes relate to themselves. They should understand the events that have shaped the local community they are part of and the wider community in which they are integrated, as well as how the two are linked.

In operational terms, this means that history education should not overlook the existing diversity, nor be limited to the national narrative coinciding with the history of the largest or dominant linguistic and cultural community in the country in which they are living. In fact, including the history of minorities and indigenous cultures is important not just in classrooms where there are learners with those backgrounds but in all classrooms

because all learners should be helped to understand the various ways in which people from diverse cultures and communities have in the past contributed to developments at local, national and global levels.

In other words, history education should be inclusive and explore the experiences of all minority groups including migrants. If history education reflects only the history and culture of the dominant group in society, it constrains learners outside that majority to engage with it, and they may perceive it to be personally meaningless, irrelevant and at times even offensive. Such history education also denies the majority group from learning about the others and, as a result, serves neither majority nor minority groups, but deepens divisions and prevents the intercultural dialogue, which is the basis of tolerant, free and peaceful diverse societies.

The thinking processes and skills acquired through the study of history constitute a kind of judgment that is transferable to any subject and is a source of knowledge construction for other subjects. It is evidence-based and encompasses an ethical dimension: learners are expected to learn something from the past that helps them face the ethical issues of today. History and citizenship education in particular are closely related subjects, but are not interchangeable. Whereas school history can contribute to citizenship education, education for citizenship does not necessarily support or rely on the standards, procedures and rationales of history. History education instils a sense of citizenship and reminds learners of questions to ask, especially about evidence. Hence, historical knowledge and critical understanding of political, social, cultural and economic systems intersects with the democratic culture necessary for active citizenship and prepares learners for engaging with democratic society, including politics, the media, civil society, the economy and the law. Therefore, history education and its methods enable learners to confront the current political, cultural and social challenges, as they foster the ability to interrogate differing, even conflicting, narratives, requiring that arguments are supported by evidence and recognising that both historians' interpretations and their own can change in the light of new evidence.

Although historical facts need to be learned for engaging in historical debates, history education goes beyond the single narrative that excludes different interpretations of historical events and thus triggers abundant and rich reflections. In doing so, it supports learners in developing critical thinking skills and a critical reflection on their own cultural affiliations. Learners can only understand the present and conceive of the future by critically understanding the events of the past. Learning about and analysing different perspectives of past events also promotes attitudes of openness to cultural otherness, other beliefs, world views and practices, enables the development of critical thinking skills and, in the long run, promotes more tolerant and equitable societies. It is unquestionable that history education has a transformative role in building sustainable and resilient democratic societies including the rehabilitation of post-conflict societies where the role of history education is crucial.

In short, the social function of history involves the informed and critical perception and understanding of the events that have an impact on the present time. Such events must be explained in the light of the historical and contextual analysis of the past in which they occurred, with methodological accuracy and counter-intuitively, combating hasty intuitions and assumptions. The construction of sustained critical thinking is fundamental for the consolidation of a truly democratic culture.

With respect to developing learners' competences for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, history education is particularly relevant for:

- ▶ identifying the complexity and the relevance of the actions of individuals or groups in their historical contexts;
- ▶ developing learners' critical thinking skills through the methods of historical analysis;
- ▶ mobilising learners' acquired knowledge of analysed historical realities to support their arguments and consequently promoting responsible interventions (fostering self-efficacy);
- ▶ promoting debates on historical topics that support learners in their critical understanding of, and openness to, the intercultural dimension of contemporary societies;
- ▶ developing learners' personal autonomy when arguing for humanistic and democratic perspectives;
- ▶ valuing and respecting human rights, diversity and the interactions between different cultures;
- ▶ promoting respect for difference and valuing all forms of diversity, including ethnic, ideological, cultural and religious;
- ▶ recognising that sensitive pasts are relevant to understanding the present time, by:
 - stimulating learners to debate matters in a rational and peaceful manner and, as a result, to be better prepared to engage constructively in democratic discussions and intercultural dialogue;
 - developing an understanding of the nature and mechanisms of conflicts and reflecting on ways of tackling them;

- acknowledging the importance of individual and collective memories for the critical understanding of painful pasts;
- raising awareness, respect and acceptance of the other and otherness and developing responsible coexistence based on understanding the full complexity and multiperspectivity of painful pasts.

2.17. Mass media, digital media and the representations of others

This paper has so far emphasised the type of intercultural encounter which occurs when two or more individuals who have different cultural affiliations from one another meet and interact. In such encounters, there is direct personal contact between the individuals involved, and some kind of interaction, communication or exchange drawing on their linguistic and communicative abilities takes place. However, intercultural encounters can also occur in other ways, involving different types of media.

For example, one can read about people who have different cultural affiliations from oneself in texts such as novels, written travelogues, history and geography textbooks, newspapers and magazine articles. Alternatively, one can encounter people with other cultural affiliations through visual images such as those which appear on television, in films, in newspapers and magazines, in advertisements, and in drawings and paintings. Such text-based and visual image-based encounters are of a qualitatively different kind from face-to-face encounters because they are unidirectional encounters in which the people who are described or depicted do not themselves encounter the reader or viewer. These encounters also differ from face-to-face encounters because they involve a third party whose assumptions and intentions can affect the nature of the encounter, namely the writer, the editor, the producer, the artist or the manufacturer of the text, video or image.

A third type of encounter may take place through the internet and involve online communication. This kind of encounter can be unidirectional, bidirectional or multidirectional. A unidirectional encounter is one where an individual simply sees an image or reads a text that has been posted by another internet user (“friend”, follower, content creator); it is unidirectional because it does not involve any response to the other person. A bidirectional encounter is one where the individual responds to and has an online exchange with another internet user (“friend”, follower, content creator) about the content that has been posted. A multidirectional encounter is one where the individual interacts with several other viewers or readers of the same content. These kinds of intercultural encounter also differ from face-to-face encounters because they are mediated by information communication technology which can impose constraints, limitations and formats on the nature and content of the communication which takes place.

These different forms of encounter that are not face-to-face require other kinds of competence and literacy, different from the linguistic and para-linguistic competences of face-to-face interaction.

Media literacy

Historically, media literacy was considered a way of shielding young people from the influence of the media. The media were viewed somewhat negatively and media literacy was aimed at “exposing” the deceitful statements emanating from the media and revealing the forms of “manipulation”. However, for the past 20 years or so, the goal of media educators has instead been to enable young people to gain a critical detachment without condemning the media. Media literacy is soundly embedded in a civic perspective and aims to encourage a critical perspective on the media as opinion-makers.

Thus, media literacy seeks to arouse reflexivity in young people and to make them adopt an active stance towards the media. To achieve these ends, various approaches are enlisted: for example analysis of media languages, debate on selected productions, pupils designing carriers of media content (newspapers, films, radio programmes, streamed content, etc.).

Sources of enunciation

Each media content must be viewed in its context and so the concept of enunciation is central. To analyse the mechanism of enunciation, one needs to ask oneself who is speaking, to whom and what their implied relationship is. These three questions make it possible to envisage what stance the enunciator of the message adopts (a politician, a company director, a militant, a nobody, etc.), the addressee of this message (a specific social group, an age group, etc.), and the implied relationship between the enunciator and the addressee (complicity, authority, counsel, etc.).

One of the major outcomes to be achieved by media literacy is knowing how to discern what the sources of enunciation are. This is an even more crucial question with the internet, because it is often not known where

the information comes from. Comparison of how the same subject is handled by different sources of enunciation can enable young people to grasp the diversity of viewpoints (commercial, militant, instructional or other purpose). When the discourse of the media is informed by an understanding of the enunciative stances, it can be viewed with greater detachment.

Types and registers of expectation

Young people have to learn to distinguish between the different types of media discourse (news, fiction, documentary, entertainment, advertising, etc.). This way of classifying content makes it possible to distinguish a documentary from a film, a light entertainment programme, or similar. But since media content is increasingly hybrid (such as studio broadcasts mingling information, light entertainment and promotion of cultural products), it is also important to enquire which type of media discourse is involved.

Each type of production has its own specific registers of expectation. An entertainment programme is not viewed by its audience in the same way as a current affairs report. What one expects of the latter is not the same as for a television quiz. Asking young people what they expect of a magazine programme, a video game or a book can thus elicit a stance of active reception.

Digital literacy

The digital turn in our societies' professional and leisure activities has brought special attention to the notion of "digital literacy". Widespread definitions of such literacy involve both a set of skills related to the capability to use and understand digital technologies, and the knowledge related to questions such as when and how to use it. Therefore, a digital literate is not only someone who knows how to use connected computers, tablets and smartphones from a technical point of view, but also an individual who knows how to engage in different types of social interaction as mediated through the internet.

The contemporary mutations of the internet have been instrumental in the informal development of digital literacy in our societies. Historically speaking, personal webpages, online forums, blogs, social networking sites and messaging apps have one after the other modified the nature of our digital landscape. The social adoption of such digital innovations implies the progressive development of more or less conscious skills and behaviours on the part of internet users. Whereas setting up a personal website required some HTML coding skills in the 1990s, most of the "social" platforms nowadays keep users away from such technicalities by providing standardised "content management systems" and default templates for self-expression and online interactions. Even if internet-based sites and apps present themselves as neutral communication "tools" or mere "services", it is important that users remember that deliberate choices are made by tech industries in order to frame interactions and shape self-expression, for example by asking the user for a profile photo, limiting expression to a certain number of characters, allowing a culturally coded self-description through predefined categories or menus, or providing specific buttons for getting feedback. Thus, when engaged in an online encounter, a digital literate should ideally be able to evaluate the part played by a particular set of constraints related to a particular website and even re-imagine the form of the exchange if it had taken place somewhere else on the web.

Metaphors and social interactions

Research shows that digital technologies in general and contemporary websites rely heavily on the use of metaphors which shape our experience. Online experiences are a particularly strong example of how a set of concepts and images may help to make technology familiar for users while providing a sense of warmth in mediated social interactions. Conventional terms such as "communities" or "friends" and verbs such as "liking" or "sharing" are thus to be considered as conceptual metaphors, encouraging users to engage in online social interactions. Without such value-laden metaphors, most of the current online practices could be interpreted as plain writing and reading activities happening between contacts, with less engaging social and symbolic implications.

The understanding of how social networking sites and applications use metaphors in order to create a frameset for online interaction shows by contrast how what happens on a screen differs from face-to-face interaction. Although "sharing something with your friends" may have a very specific meaning for someone "in real life", when it comes to internet practices, one can acknowledge that the same expression works mainly as a metaphor for describing the effects of a clickable feature which allows reproduction of contents on other people's web pages. In order to go beyond literal interpretations, what "commenting", "liking" and establishing "friendships" mean online can therefore be analysed in a similar way. All these terms may relate to culturally rooted social interactions and rituals but can only exist online through metaphorised text fields and buttons. The use of such

“social” features and the positive images that they convey engage individuals in online relationships that can be more or less intense in terms of feelings, attitudes and behaviours (gratitude, reciprocity, obligations, etc.).

Privacy issues

Since internet users are constantly invited to post personal content online, privacy issues have become a staple of intellectual debates surrounding technology. On the one hand, the legal and economic aspects of privacy issues involve both the protection of personal data and its commercial exploitation by internet industries. On the other hand, the moral and cultural aspects of privacy issues involve individual and collective appreciations of what is suitable or acceptable for an online post, as opposed to what should remain private or secret in terms of self-disclosure.

Awareness of the legal, economic, moral or cultural dimensions of privacy issues may vary from one group to another, depending on educational and generational variables. Digital education initiatives tend to focus on managing a profile’s or an app’s privacy settings (which contents are available to whom) and reflecting on the interpretations that can be made from the standpoint of different audiences (friends, family, colleagues, strangers). From an intercultural point of view, privacy issues raise complementary questions about the limits of sharing (for example what is culturally defined as a “sensitive” picture) and the perception of archived contents (for example whether something should be remembered or deleted).

Because intercultural encounters can vary in these different ways and require different subsets of competences, there are three volumes of the AIE. First, the AIE is intended to be used for reflection on face-to-face intercultural encounters; second, the AIEVM is intended to be used for reflection on image-based intercultural encounters that take place through visual media; and third, the AIETI is intended to be used for intercultural encounters that involve online communication and take place through the internet.

2.18. The Council of Europe’s work on digital citizenship education

Given the challenges posed by media literacy, digital literacy, privacy and online interactions, the Council of Europe has identified a further role for formal education: supporting learners’ online and offline lives as parts of a whole. As the digital revolution has erased physical barriers and overcome local, regional and national frontiers, education needs to help learners navigate the new online realities offered by the internet and mass media.

The Digital Citizenship Education project was created by the Council of Europe to support learners in three aspects of their online life – being online, well-being online and rights online – and to ensure that they use the fundamental principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the digital environment. The project builds directly upon the RFCDC and complements the Council of Europe’s work on internet literacy as part of a coherent approach to educating citizens for the society of the future.

This future citizen, or rather digital citizen, can be identified as someone who, through the development of a broad range of competences, is able to actively, positively and responsibly engage in both online and offline communities, whether local, national or global. As digital technologies are disruptive in nature and constantly evolving, competence building is a lifelong process that should begin from earliest childhood at home and at school, in formal, informal and non-formal educational settings.

According to the Digital Citizenship Education project, the education of the digital citizen concerns three main areas.

Being online

- ▶ **Access and inclusion** concerns access to the digital environment and includes a range of competences that relate not only to overcoming different forms of digital exclusion but also to the skills needed by future citizens to participate in digital spaces that are open to every kind of minority and diversity of opinion.
- ▶ **Learning and creativity** refers to the willingness and attitude of citizens towards learning in digital environments over their life course, both to develop and express different forms of creativity, with different tools, in different contexts. It covers the development of personal and professional competences as citizens prepare for the challenges of technology-rich societies with confidence and in innovative ways.
- ▶ **Media and information literacy** concerns the ability to interpret, understand and express creativity through digital media as critical thinkers. Being media and information literate is something that needs to be developed through education and through a constant exchange with the environment around us.

It is essential to go beyond simply “being able to” use one or another media, for example, or simply to “be informed” about something. A digital citizen has to maintain critical thinking as a basis for meaningful and effective participation in his/her community.

Well-being online

- ▶ **Ethics and empathy** concern online ethical behaviour and interaction with others based on skills such as the ability to recognise and understand the feelings and perspectives of others. Empathy constitutes an essential requirement for positive online interaction and for realising the possibilities that the digital world affords.
- ▶ **Health and well-being** relate to the fact that digital citizens inhabit both virtual and real spaces. For this reason, the basic skills of digital competence alone are not sufficient. Individuals also require a set of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding that render them more aware of issues related to health and well-being. In a digitally rich world, health and well-being imply being aware of challenges and opportunities that can affect wellness, including but not limited to online addiction, ergonomics and posture, and excessive use of digital and mobile devices.
- ▶ **e-presence and communications** refers to the development of the personal and interpersonal competences that support digital citizens in building and maintaining an online presence and identity, as well as online interactions that are positive, coherent and consistent. It includes competences such as online communication and interaction with others in virtual social spaces, as well as the management of one’s data and traces.

Rights online

- ▶ **Active participation** relates to the competences that citizens need in order to make responsible decisions when they interact within the digital environments they inhabit, while participating actively and positively in the democratic cultures in which they live.
- ▶ **Rights and responsibilities** are things that citizens have in the physical world, and digital citizens in the online world also have certain rights and responsibilities. Digital citizens have rights of privacy, security, access and inclusion, freedom of expression and more. However, with those rights come certain responsibilities, such as applying ethics, employing empathy and ensuring a safe and respectful digital environment for all.
- ▶ **Privacy and security** includes two different concepts: privacy concerns mainly the personal protection of one’s own and others’ online information, and security, which is related more to one’s own awareness of online actions and behaviour. It covers information management skills and online safety practices (including the use of navigation filters, passwords, anti-virus and firewall software) to deal with and avoid dangerous or unpleasant situations.
- ▶ **Consumer awareness** relates to the fact that the World Wide Web, with its broad dimensions, such as social media and other virtual social spaces, is an environment where often the fact of being a digital citizen also means being a consumer. Understanding the implications of the commercial reality of online spaces is one of the competences that individuals will have to use in order to maintain their autonomy as digital citizens.

Digital citizenship and engagement involve a wide range of activities, from creating, consuming, sharing, playing and socialising, to investigating, communicating, learning and working. Competent digital citizens are able to respond to new and everyday challenges related to learning, work, employability, leisure, inclusion and participation in society, respecting human rights and intercultural differences. In addition, they are able to make appropriate judgments about the visual images that they encounter online, especially when these images depict people who have different cultural affiliations from themselves, and they are also able to engage in appropriate, effective and respectful intercultural dialogue through the internet with people who have different cultural affiliations from themselves. For this reason, the AIE (especially the AIEVM and the AIETI) can make a significant contribution to learners’ digital citizenship education.

3. Cultural boundaries which may be crossed in an intercultural encounter

In this section, we describe some of the cultural boundaries across which an intercultural encounter may take place. Our aim here is to highlight the range of contexts across which all three volumes of the AIE can be applied, and to explain 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 characteristics 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, with the members of an ethnic group being 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 AIE is pre-eminently suitable for assisting learners in their reflections on the interethnic 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. National and state groups

A second context in which the AIE 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. Nations also need to be distinguished from ethnic groups – most crucially, ethnic groups do not have a politicised awareness of themselves as a nation, whereas nations do.

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 AIE 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.

3.3. 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 interrelationship 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 (for example Judaism, Shintoism), while others (for example Buddhism, Islam, Christianity) 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 mistakenly 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 variation 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 encounters 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 also 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 among people of different religions in a troubled modern world gives added impetus to such encounters at local, national and international level.

The AIE is ideally suited to supporting learners in reflecting on interreligious encounters which they have experienced, and for exploring some of these complexities concerning the nature of religions. The AIE is particularly useful for supporting learners’ reflections on the variations in belief that exist both within and between religions, as well as on the diversity of religious customs and practices that exist.

3.4. 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 minority 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, among others, 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 and 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. It has, however, a psychological value in interaction with others, since interaction 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 – even if they speak 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 AIE 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.

3.5. 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” – when used in ordinary, everyday language – is based on differences in skin pigmentation, hair texture and physiognomy.

However, scientific research has revealed that racial categories have no foundations in human biology and that the classification of people in terms of skin pigmentation, hair texture and physiognomy is arbitrary, a matter of mere opinion and not based on the nature of things. There is more variability in such features within each so-called “race” than there is between 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 the genetic variability between the putative races is no greater than the variability within them.

It is because racial distinctions are arbitrary and often used for political, social and economic purposes that definitions of “races” have varied significantly across different historical periods and across different cultures, with curious and often devastating consequences. For example, at the start of the 20th 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. The mass transportation of African captives for slavery from the 17th to the 19th centuries is a horrific example of the devastating consequences of a system of racial differentiation and discrimination used in pursuit of economic goals.

In other words, the widespread perception that “races” are “real” biological categories is a consequence of social factors. These factors include racial prejudice, discriminatory practices, anti-miscegenation laws and social norms concerning marriage arrangements 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 to justify the differential treatment of people socially, economically and politically, and to perpetuate existing patterns of advantage, disadvantage and exploitation.

While we now have a much better scientific understanding of the arbitrariness of all systems of racial categorisation and their lack of any meaningful biological foundations, individuals who are socialised within a culture that reifies and normalises a system of racial categories often come to perceive those categories as “real”, despite their arbitrariness, due to the constant use of the categories in everyday discourse and practices. The social reality of “race” may then impact very seriously indeed on the everyday lives of many individuals through racism, discrimination, inequality and disadvantage, the experience of which and the responses to which can further entrench the prevailing system of racial categories in people’s everyday perceptions. 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 process through which races are socially constructed categories imposed on the social world through human discourse and social practices, rather than natural categories which are found in the world.

The use of the AIE for the analysis of cross-racial encounters may, under appropriate supervision, lend itself well to an exploration of how perceptions of race can impact on understandings 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 AIE can be used to initiate a wider discussion of the social-constructedness of race and its social consequences.

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 AIE. 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 AIE 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 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 AIE can therefore also be used when learners have encountered an individual from another supranational group. In such a context, the AIE 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.

3.8. Some final reflections concerning cultural boundaries

In the preceding sections, we have examined a variety of boundaries, some of which often come to mind when thinking about cultural groups, for example the boundaries associated with ethnicity, nation, language, race and religion. However, as we noted earlier in this paper (see section 2.1), people identify not only with these kinds of cultural groups but also with many others including their families, generational groups, work organisations, occupational groups, sexual orientation groups, sports groups, disability groups and similar. The AIE may be applied to intercultural encounters which occur across the boundaries of all of these groups as well. For example, a boy could use the AIE when, during an encounter with a girl, he realises that he has learned something important about differences in gender roles that he had not realised before, or a young person could use the AIE when an encounter with an elderly person has made her or him think in a new and different way about differences in attitudes and values between the generations.

We also saw earlier in this paper that all individuals participate in multiple cultures and as a result have multiple cultural identities (sections 2.1 and 2.10). The AIE may be used when encounters occur across multiple cultural boundaries simultaneously, for example when a young German girl who does not speak or understand any Greek encounters an elderly Greek man who speaks to her in German. Indeed, it is rare for an intercultural encounter to involve only a single cultural boundary – it is far more common for intercultural encounters to involve multiple boundaries. For this reason, many applications of the AIE may well focus on encounters that have taken place across multiple boundaries simultaneously. That said, in such encounters, it is possible that only one or a few of the boundaries in play are actually noticed by the participants at any one time, and it is also possible that, as the encounter progresses, different boundaries become apparent from those that were most obvious at the outset. In reflecting on the nature of intercultural encounters, it is important to be mindful of their possible complexities and to not oversimplify the dynamics that may be involved.

4. The competences required for interculturality¹

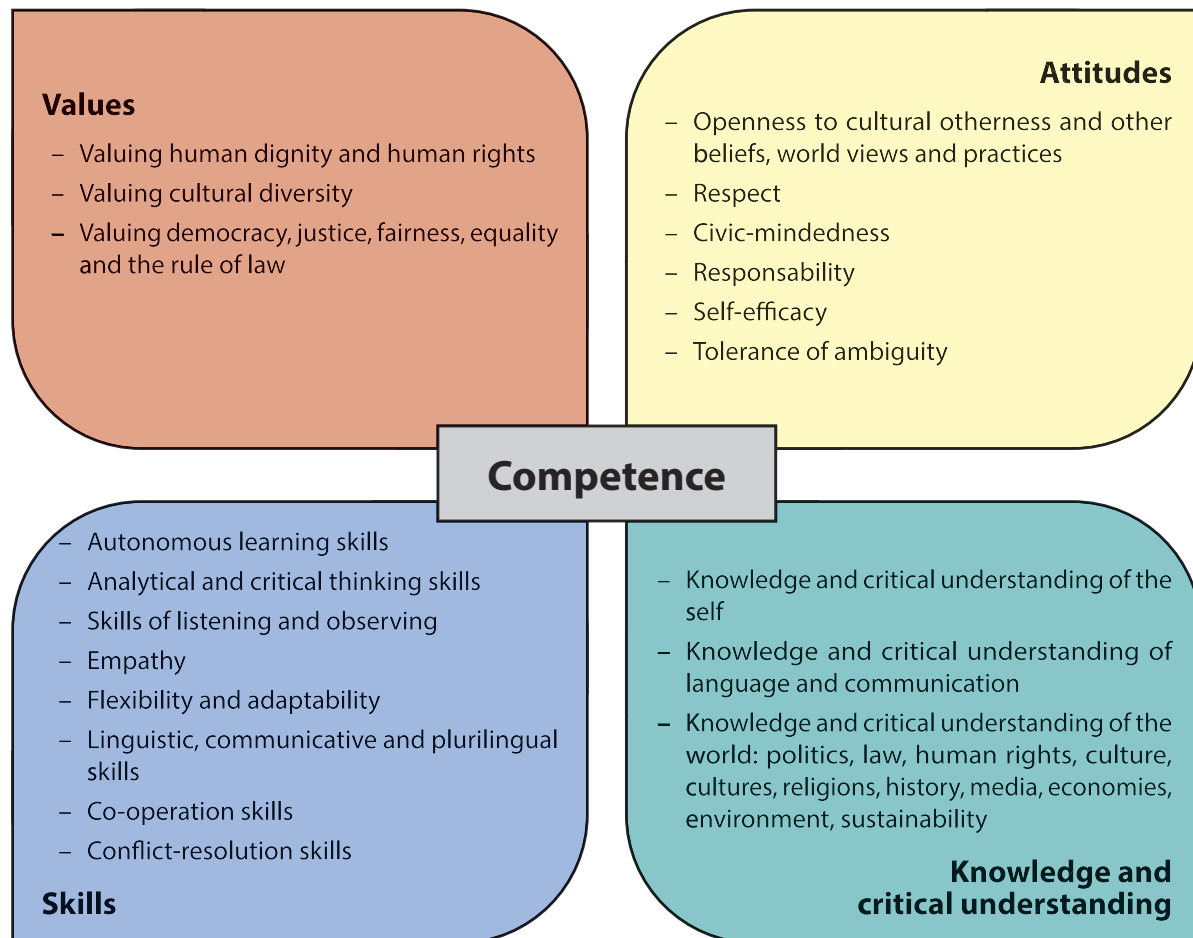
As noted in section 1 of this paper, the Council of Europe's RFCDC provides a comprehensive description of the competences that an individual needs in order to:

- ▶ promote and protect human rights;
- ▶ act as a responsible democratic citizen;
- ▶ comprehend and appreciate the perspectives and world views of those who have different cultural affiliations from themselves;
- ▶ engage in respectful intercultural dialogue.

1. Readers who are familiar with the first edition of the AIE should note that this section has been substantially amended in order to bring the terminology into alignment with that used in the Council of Europe's RFCDC.

Comprehending and appreciating other people’s perspectives and world views, and engaging in respectful intercultural dialogue, are, of course, directly relevant to participating successfully in intercultural encounters. The full set of competences required for all four purposes listed above are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The full set of competences specified by the RFCDC



Fifteen of the 20 competences shown in Figure 1 are required to engage appropriately, effectively and respectfully in intercultural encounters, and these will be discussed in detail below. The three volumes of the AIE have been designed to support and foster the development of these 15 competences, and to encourage individuals to become involved in subsequent actions which can help foster a deeper understanding of different cultural practices and world views and lead to engagement as active citizens with social issues. In this section, we discuss each of these 15 competences in turn.

The basis of successful interaction within intercultural encounters is in the attitudes of the person interacting with people who have other cultural affiliations. There are several distinct attitudes which are important here.

First, an attitude of openness is fundamental. Openness to cultural otherness is an attitude towards those who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself. It involves sensitivity towards cultural diversity and to world views, beliefs, values and practices which differ from one’s own, as well as curiosity about, and interest in discovering and learning about, other people’s cultural orientations and world views, beliefs, values and practices. It entails a willingness to suspend one’s judgment and disbelief about other people’s world views, beliefs, values and practices, and a willingness to question the “naturalness” of one’s own world view, beliefs, values and practices.

Openness is usually exhibited through seeking out and taking up opportunities to engage and co-operate with those who are perceived to be culturally different. It needs to be distinguished from the attitude of having an interest in collecting experiences of the “exotic” merely for one’s own personal enjoyment or benefit.

- ▶ **Openness to cultural otherness:** being open towards and having curiosity about people from other cultures, and a willingness to suspend one's own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones.

Second, an attitude of respect for people from other cultures is also vital. Respect towards those who have different cultural affiliations assumes the intrinsic dignity and equality of all human beings and their right to choose their own affiliations. Respect does not require minimising or ignoring the differences that might exist between the self and the other, which can sometimes be significant and profound. Respect does not require, either, agreement with, adoption of or conversion to what is respected. It is instead an attitude that involves the positive appreciation of the dignity and the right of the other person to hold those affiliations, while nevertheless recognising and acknowledging the differences which exist between the self and the other. If people do not have 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.

An important aspect of respect is acknowledging and appreciating the identities that other people have. There might be a tendency to perceive their identities through ones we already know. We might assume for example that "being a girl" is the same identity wherever one is, whereas this in fact differs from group to group and from culture to culture. An interculturally competent person respects the identities that people from other groups and cultures ascribe to themselves, rather than imposing identities upon them.

- ▶ **Respect:** having respect for people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own, based on an assumption of the intrinsic dignity and equality of all human beings and their right to choose their own affiliations, beliefs, opinions, practices and identities. Respect includes acknowledging and appreciating the identities which people from other groups ascribe to themselves, as well as the meanings which they themselves associate with those identities.

In addition to the attitudes of openness and respect, the skill of empathy is required for successful intercultural communication, for 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 with a different cultural background, because they have:

- ▶ a different set of beliefs (what they assume is true, for example about what is classed as edible and inedible or what is considered polite behaviour);
- ▶ a different set of values (what they assume is important in their lives, for example 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, for example 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 when each person starts from a different set of assumptions. Successful communication depends on two things:

- ▶ being able to "decentre" one's attention from one's own cultural perspective, which often appears to be "natural";
- ▶ being able to adopt the perspective of the other person and accepting that their ways also seem "natural" to them.

People with high levels of empathy are able to describe what others feel and think in certain situations. They are able to see the relationship to 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.

People with a low degree of empathy cannot recognise and describe the thoughts or feelings of others. They cannot emulate the way others think and how they perceive a situation. 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 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.

Although openness and respect are essential for successful intercultural interaction, these competences have to be complemented by empathy. It is possible to be open to and to respect other people's beliefs, values and behaviours without necessarily realising how these may impact on their perceptions of us and on the way that they respond to our beliefs, values and behaviours.

- ▶ **Empathy:** the ability to apprehend and appreciate the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of other people, as well as their emotions, feelings and needs.

In interaction with people of other cultures, people often have concrete aims they wish to achieve, and otherness could be a potential barrier. People who have a high level of tolerance of ambiguity are able to meet this challenge and accept ambiguity while finding a solution – and while also 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 might differ from those of one's own culture. Tolerance of 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 of ambiguity experience unstructured and ambiguous situations as unpleasant and threatening. They either try to avoid such situations or to escape from 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 of ambiguity:** the acceptance of ambiguity and lack of clarity, and the willingness to deal with this constructively.

In addition, successful intercultural interaction requires knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication, a range of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, and skills of listening and observing.

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 and 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, and similar, also differs from one culture to the other. This is usually 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 or 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. Knowledge and critical understanding of how linguistic and communicative conventions operate is therefore crucial.

Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills are equally crucial. These skills include:

- ▶ the ability to recognise the different forms of expression and the different communicative conventions (both verbal and non-verbal) in the communications employed by other social groups and their cultures;
- ▶ the ability to adjust and modify one's communicative behaviour so that one uses the communicative conventions (both verbal and non-verbal) that are appropriate to one's interlocutor(s) and to the prevailing cultural setting;
- ▶ the ability to ask questions of clarification in an appropriate and sensitive manner in cases where the meanings being expressed by another person are unclear or where inconsistencies between the verbal and non-verbal messages produced by another person are detected;

- ▶ the ability to manage breakdowns in communication, for example by requesting repetitions or reformulations from others, or providing restatements, revisions or simplifications of one's own misunderstood communications;
- ▶ the ability to meet the communicative demands of intercultural situations by using more than one language or language variety or by using a shared language or lingua franca to understand another language.

Skills of listening and observing are also extremely important in intercultural encounters. These involve:

- ▶ attending not only to what is being said but also to how it is being said and to the body language of the speaker;
- ▶ attending to possible inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages;
- ▶ attending to subtleties of meaning and to what might be only partially said or indeed left unsaid;
- ▶ attending to the relationship between what is being said and the social context in which it is said.

Intercultural encounters therefore require the following three competences: knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication; linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills; and skills of listening and observing.

- ▶ **Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication:** having knowledge and understanding that the meanings which are associated with words, linguistic forms, conversational conventions and gestures vary from one culture to another, and that people who have other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions from oneself, which are meaningful from their perspective, even when they are using the same language as oneself.

- ▶ **Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills:** the abilities to: interpret communicative acts from the perspective of the other culture; adjust and modify one's communicative behaviour so that one uses the communicative conventions (both verbal and non-verbal) that are appropriate to one's interlocutor(s) and to the prevailing cultural setting; and meet the communicative demands of intercultural situations by using more than one language or language variety or by using a shared language or lingua franca to understand another language.

- ▶ **Skills of listening and observing:** the ability to pay close attention not only to what is being said but also to how it is being said through the use of tone, pitch, loudness, rate and fluency of voice, and the ability to pay close attention to the person's accompanying body language, especially their eye movements, facial expressions and gestures.

In addition, appropriate and effective behaviour within intercultural encounters requires individuals to be flexible and adaptable, to be able to adjust their language and behaviour in response to the communication styles and behaviours of the other person, and to avoid violating the communicative and cultural norms of the other person. Flexibility is also required to enable individuals to adjust their patterns of thinking, feeling or behaviour in response to new learning, new situational contingencies and new intercultural encounters.

- ▶ **Flexibility and adaptability:** the ability to adjust and adapt one's own language and behaviour in response to the communication styles and behaviours of others, and the ability to adjust one's skills and behaviours in response to new learning, circumstances and encounters.

Knowledge and critical understanding of culture and cultures is also vital for intercultural encounters. First, one needs to have a general knowledge and understanding of how cultural groups and cultural identities function, both one's own and others. Second, it is helpful to have a general understanding of how people's cultural affiliations often shape their world views, beliefs, values, behaviours and interactions with others. Third, it is extremely important to understand that cultural groups are always internally variable and heterogeneous, and that all stereotypes are overgeneralisations that may well be erroneous when applied to any one individual person from a given culture. Fourth, it is important to have knowledge of the processes of intercultural interaction which may affect successful communication, such as the impact of stereotypes and prejudices (both positive and negative) and differences of non-verbal behaviour such as proxemics and other

aspects of “body language”. Finally, if it can be anticipated with whom one will interact, then knowledge and understanding of that person’s culture (for example of the particular values, norms, practices, discourses and products that may operate within that culture) is also very helpful.

- ▶ **Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (culture and cultures):** understanding how groups and identities function; understanding how people’s cultural affiliations can shape their orientation towards the world; understanding that the people who belong to any given culture cannot be accurately characterised in terms of a set of stereotypical characteristics; knowledge about the processes of intercultural interaction; and knowledge about the specific cultures of other people and of their practices and products.

As we have already discussed in this paper, encounters with cultural otherness do not always take place in face-to-face settings – they can also take place when reading texts about or viewing visual images of people who have different cultural affiliations from oneself (see section 2.17). In addition, intercultural encounters can take place through the internet and involve online communication rather than face-to-face communication. In order to act appropriately in the context of these kinds of encounters, individuals need to have knowledge and critical understanding of media.

For example, in order to interpret and make judgments about texts and visual images of cultural others that are encountered in the mass media, it is important to understand that in mass media outlets, there is always someone who selects and edits texts and images before printing or transmitting them for reading or viewing, and that these texts and images may therefore carry social, cultural and political messages about cultural groups either unintentionally or intentionally (for example through the deliberate use of stereotypes). In order to deconstruct these messages, one needs to understand the possible motives, intentions and purposes that the producers and editors of texts and visual images may have. Likewise, when interacting with cultural others through digital media, it is important to have some understanding of how digital messages, images and displays are produced, and of the constraints on communication that are imposed by digital media. This is because the quality of the communication that takes place in digital encounters is likely to be influenced by these factors.

- ▶ **Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (media):** knowledge and understanding of: the processes through which, in the mass media, material is selected and edited before transmission for public consumption; how the mass media often transmit implicit social, cultural and political messages about cultural groups; the possible motives, intentions and purposes that the producers and editors of texts and images for the mass media may have; and how digital messages, images and displays are produced and constrained by digital media.

However, no one can anticipate all of their knowledge needs. For this reason, it is extremely important for participants in intercultural encounters to have autonomous learning skills, so that they can acquire new knowledge, if necessary, and integrate it with what they already know. People need especially to be able to ask people from other cultures about their beliefs, values and behaviours which, because they are often unconscious, those people cannot easily explain. It can therefore also be helpful to be able to identify, locate and access other possible sources of the information, advice or guidance, which might be either authoritative documentary sources or other people who are knowledgeable about the culture that has been encountered. For this reason, people need to utilise skills of both discovery and interaction as part of their set of autonomous learning skills.

- ▶ **Autonomous learning skills:** the ability to find out new knowledge about other cultures, either by consulting authoritative documentary sources or by asking other people.

Several further competences are also important for participating appropriately and effectively in intercultural encounters. Because people need to be able to see how intercultural misunderstandings can arise, and how they might be able to resolve them, they need analytical and critical thinking skills. Of particular importance is the ability to identify and interpret aspects of another culture, by comparing and relating those aspects to what is already known from one’s own culture, and identifying similarities and differences. By putting ideas, events and 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 cultural identity. These skills of comparison, interpreting and relating are therefore crucial.

Furthermore, however open towards, curious about and respectful of other people's beliefs, values and behaviours one is, one's own beliefs, values and behaviours are deeply embedded and can create reactions and rejection. Because of this possible response, people need to have knowledge and critical understanding of the self – they need to become aware of their own cultural orientations and how these influence their views of people who have different cultural affiliations from themselves. In particular, they need to have a critical awareness of themselves and of their own values, perspectives and practices, as well as a critical awareness of the values, perspectives and practices characterising the cultures of others (see "Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (culture and cultures)" above). In short, individuals need to acquire what has been termed "critical cultural awareness": the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of a systematic process of reasoning, values, perspectives, practices and products present in one's own and other cultures.

▶ **Analytical and critical thinking skills:** the ability to understand and interpret the values, perspectives, practices and products of another culture by comparing them to corresponding things in one's own culture and to see the similarities and the differences between them; and the ability to evaluate values, perspectives, practices and products both in one's own culture and in other cultures, based on explicit and specifiable criteria or principles.

▶ **Knowledge and critical understanding of the self:** knowledge and understanding of one's own cultural affiliations; knowledge and understanding of one's perspective on the world and of its cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects and biases; and knowledge and understanding of the assumptions and preconceptions which underlie one's perspective on the world.

It is therefore important to make one's values explicit and conscious in any evaluative response to others. There is a fundamental values position that is inherent in interculturality, a position which incorporates valuing human dignity and human rights, and valuing cultural diversity. This values position involves:

- ▶ recognising that all people share a common humanity and have equal dignity irrespective of their particular cultural affiliations, status or circumstances;
- ▶ recognising that the dignity and human rights of others should always be respected;
- ▶ recognising that human rights provide the foundation for living together as equals in society;
- ▶ recognising that all people have the right to be different and the right to choose their own perspectives, views, beliefs and opinions;
- ▶ recognising that people should always respect the perspectives, views, beliefs, lifestyles and practices of other people (unless these undermine the human rights and freedoms of others);
- ▶ recognising that people should listen to and engage in dialogue with those who are perceived to be different from themselves.

In short, interculturality involves the valuing of human dignity and human rights, as well as the valuing of cultural diversity.

▶ **Valuing human dignity and human rights:** the general belief that every individual human being is of equal worth, has equal dignity, is entitled to equal respect and is entitled to the same set of human rights and ought to be treated accordingly.

▶ **Valuing cultural diversity:** the general belief that other cultural affiliations, cultural variability and diversity, and pluralism of perspectives, views and practices ought to be positively regarded and appreciated.

The RFCDC 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 a 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.

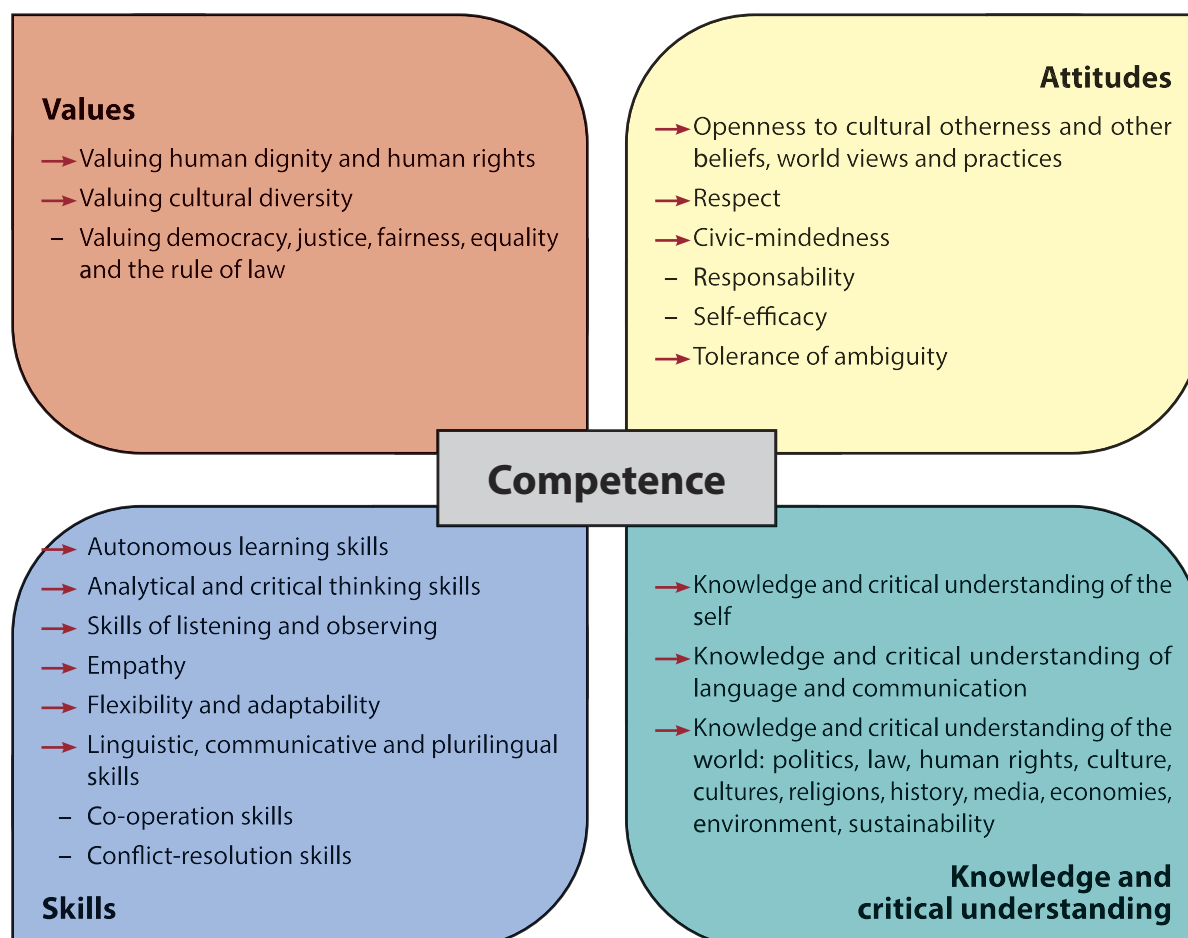
In order to engage in these various actions, one needs to have an attitude of civic-mindedness. Civic-mindedness involves mindfulness of, a sense of solidarity with, and a sense of responsibility towards other people. It also involves a willingness to co-operate and work with other people, to engage in respectful dialogue with them and to contribute actively to the common good. As such, civic-mindedness entails an action orientation and the readiness and willingness to engage and interact with others.

▶ **Civic-mindedness:** the readiness and willingness to undertake activities either alone or with others with the aim of making a contribution to the common good.

The 15 competences which have been discussed above are all required to engage appropriately, effectively and respectfully in intercultural encounters. All of these 15 competences are contained within the RFCDC. Readers who wish to learn more about these competences should consult Volume 1 of the RFCDC.

Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic summary of the 15 competences, indicated by arrows, that need to be deployed within intercultural encounters and their fourfold classification by the RFCDC.

Figure 2: The model of competences from the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* with the competences promoted through the use of the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters* indicated by arrows



Because the three volumes of the AIE have been purposely designed to promote these particular competences, the use of the AIE can make a significant contribution to equipping learners with the competences that are needed for active participation not only in intercultural encounters and intercultural dialogue but also in democratic culture more broadly.

5. Conclusions

This paper has described the policy context within which the AIE 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 other 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 three volumes of the AIE have 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 AIE, including culture, multicultural society, plurality, pluriculturalism, interculturality, plurilingualism, intercultural citizenship and media literacies. 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, national, religious, linguistic, racial, local, regional and supranational boundaries. Finally, this paper has described the numerous competences which are required to engage appropriately and effectively with intercultural encounters. These are the specific intercultural competences which the AIE has been designed to promote and foster.

The intention is that the three volumes of the AIE will be used in a range of different contexts, including both formal and non-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 AIE 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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Concepts for discussion

1. Introduction

The following definitions and questions have been formulated to encourage young people (in the final years of school education or early years of higher education) to engage with key concepts related to culture, identity and cultural interaction. They are designed to introduce students to the terminology of cultural discourse, to enable students to make connections between these concepts, the societies in which they live and their own lives, and so support their development as intercultural learners. The questions provide stimulus for group discussions. Facilitators of these discussions may wish to familiarise themselves with the fuller descriptions of the concepts in the longer concept paper, "Context, concepts and theories", before the session, or to direct their students towards this fuller version after the discussion to consolidate and extend their learning.

2. Culture

- ▶ Are there elements in your life that you (or others) might view as part of your culture? What are they? How did you acquire them?

The word "culture" is associated with practices, beliefs, values, symbols and traditions, with particular ways of living and of understanding the world. Cultures can be understood as the fixed, inherited features of different national, ethnic and religious groups. This way of talking about culture as the distinct and essential features of a particular group is called "dominant" discourse. Cultures can also be understood as dynamic and changing, continually being redefined by individuals and groups as they interact with others of different backgrounds or respond to changing circumstances. This way of talking about culture is known as "demotic discourse".

- ▶ What might the benefits and disadvantages be of having a strong sense of a fixed, inherited cultural identity?
- ▶ Can you think of any instances in your environment where interactions between different cultures are creating new cultural expressions?

3. Multicultural societies

- ▶ Could the society in which you live be described as a multicultural society? Explain your answer?

A multicultural society is a society that has become culturally diverse through the immigration of people born and raised in other cultures who have brought elements of their heritage culture to the new society where they have settled. Sometimes multicultural societies are understood as a patchwork of distinct cultural groups living alongside each other but separately. The reality is usually more complex both because of the internal diversity of different cultural groups and because of the dynamic interaction between different cultures, values, practices and identities in those societies.

Societies can respond in different ways to their cultural plurality by public recognition of various minority ethnic, cultural and religious identities and public celebration of their distinctiveness (sometimes called "multiculturalism"), or by emphasising the common bonds of the society and the shared identity of its members.

- ▶ Consider the responses to cultural diversity above. Can you think of instances of either the public celebration of cultural difference or a public emphasis on shared identity in the society or the country where you live?
- ▶ What do you think are the most appropriate responses schools and educational institutions can make to the diversity of multicultural societies?

4. Attitudes to other cultures

Amina, a devout Muslim, has three non-Muslim neighbours who are aware that she prays regularly five times a day.

Neighbour A thinks that Amina's prayer routine is really a waste of time but accepts that Amina has a right to do it if she wants.

Neighbour B thinks that the prayer routine is a good thing for Amina as it gives her a discipline and purpose and, in her thinking, brings her closer to God.

Neighbour C is very interested in Amina's prayer routine. She has talked about it with her and shared with Amina her own ideas about how she might benefit herself from a regular time for reflection in her own daily routine.

- ▶ What words would you use to describe the different attitudes shown by the three neighbours to Amina's practice and beliefs?

There are a number of ways in which we can respond to people of other cultures with different beliefs and ways of living from our own. We might respond negatively with prejudice, suspicion and intolerance or we might take one of a number of more positive positions:

- ▶ we could show attitudes of "tolerance" meaning that we accept the right of others to behave differently from ourselves even if we don't agree with them;
 - ▶ we may show "respect" towards them meaning we see value and positive elements in their beliefs and practices even if we do not share them;
 - ▶ we may engage in "intercultural dialogue" with people of different cultures, exchanging views and being open to revising some of our own ideas in the light of the new meanings we learn from them.
-
- ▶ Are there any beliefs and practices belonging to different cultures that are not tolerated in the society where you live (or your school's community), and do you think that it is right to set these limits on what should be tolerated?
 - ▶ Can you think of any ways in which your own ideas have been influenced by encounters with the beliefs and practices of people from other cultures?

5. Citizenship and nationality

- ▶ What is your citizenship and what is your nationality? Are they the same?

Although someone might for example be French by nationality and a citizen of France, citizenship of a state and nationality do not always correspond. A state is a sovereign political entity with demarcated borders in which the rule of a government is sanctioned by law. The term "citizenship" is used to refer to the legal status of belonging to a state and citizens have rights and obligations within that state. On the other hand, a nation is a named human community with attachment to a historic homeland, which has a shared history, shared symbols, traditions and practices. Many nations do not at present have their own state or have been stateless at some time in their history. The Polish nation was an example of a stateless nation during the 19th century, when Poland was divided up between different states. Some, like England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom, are grouped together to participate in one state made from several nations.

- ▶ What are your rights as a citizen of a state and what are your obligations?
- ▶ Is the idea of nationality important to your identity? Explain why it is or isn't important.

6. History and ...

... (i) culture

- ▶ What cultural symbols are linked to the historical narrative of your nation?
- ▶ What value do you think they have in today's world?

The relation between history and culture is one of reciprocity. Cultural contexts shape the understanding of the world around us, whether near or far, and in regard to the interplay between the past and the present. The study of history allows for an awareness of how culture permeates different world views, collective behaviours, historical narratives and the creation of historical myths and stereotypes.

A characteristic of Europe is its ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, yet mainstreamed historical narratives fostering national pride are often one-sided and do not include different cultures, nor do they acknowledge that the history of humankind is one of multiculturalism where cultures have communicated when different communities have come into contact, influenced and borrowed from each other.

Looking at history with a cultural lens helps young people understand the historical construction of national identities with human mobility and interaction being a consistent factor in cultural history.

... (ii) the “other”

Currently, there is an increased awareness, particularly where processes of reviewing colonial pasts have been initiated, that history education has a role to play in helping young people value the multiple identities of both “the other” and themselves, instead of “othering”.

Othering is a form of stereotyping where we perceive ourselves as part of a united and undifferentiated group of people, as “us”, and those outside the group as fundamentally different, as “them” or “the other”, who are inferior or weaker – even possibly dangerous – and hence “we” are seen as stronger or better. Justifications for othering are commonly based on myths and traditions about national uniqueness (for example othering for justifying colonialism and enslavement).

Inclusive history education values the multiple identities of both “the other” and ourselves and promotes intercultural dialogue.

- ▶ Can you think of how history has influenced the way you look at other groups?
- ▶ Does this historical perspective influence your willingness and ability to meet and get to know individuals from this group?

... (iii) citizenship

The concept of “citizenship” has had a varied history reflecting the changing contexts in which it has been used. In the city-states of the ancient world, the status of citizen was reserved for a minority of the population with political influence but also with responsibilities towards the rest of society. In revolutionary times, citizenship as a concept was used to demand an increasing involvement in political and civil society for previously excluded sectors of the population. As the world was divided into distinct political territories, citizenship was closely associated with belonging and the status of citizen of a particular state or empire was used to claim rights (for example freedom, security, political participation and residence). Recent globalising trends are promoting a new form of citizenship that encourages a sense of belonging and of rights and responsibilities that transcend national and cultural boundaries.

- ▶ What rights and responsibilities do you now have as a citizen that your ancestors might not have had 300 years ago?
- ▶ Do you think you and your fellow citizens are better off through having these rights and responsibilities?
- ▶ What resources or reasons can history provide for intercultural communication?

7. Multiple identities: interpreting the self

- ▶ Write 10 words to define yourself. Divide them into two groups: “I am ...” and “I am a ...”. Compare your answer with the keywords of some of your classmates.
- ▶ Usually, you will find that many of the words following “I am ...” refer to personal characteristics. The words following “I am a ...” often refer to belonging to various groups (large or small, permanent or temporary). The section below takes the link with groups further.

Individuals usually identify with more than one social group because they are simultaneously members of many different groups (national groups, racial groups, religious groups, gender groups, etc.); they have multiple identities. Identifying with multiple social groups helps us to position and define ourselves in the social world relative to other people.

When we attribute value and emotional significance to being a member of a particular social group, this group forms a salient part of our own self-concept (for example, being a Real Madrid supporter or being a Christian) and we acquire a subjective identification with that group.

The different groups we belong to are not always salient to us: for instance, nationality may be irrelevant if we are among fellow countrymen or women. 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 somebody from another ethnic or religious group).

- ▶ Which of the social groups you identify with is/are more important for you? Why do you think it is/they are so important for you? What would you be prepared to do to assert your membership in that particular group(s) if you felt it was criticised or under some kind of “attack”?
- ▶ Have you experienced any circumstance in which “differences” between your social group(s) and the social group(s) of other(s) have made one (or more) of your multiple identities stand out? Have the “differences” helped you understand yourself better?

8. Perceptions of people from other cultures: interpreting the other

- ▶ Reflect upon how you viewed other cultures and people from other cultures when you were little and how you perceive other people and cultures now. Discuss whether your perceptions about others have changed and, if applicable, why you think they have changed.

The development of individuals’ perceptions of people from other cultures happens during childhood and adolescence.

There is a great individual variation in the development of children’s attitudes towards their own cultural and national groups and in the development of their perceptions of others. Sometimes children’s attitudes to people from other groups become more positive with increasing age; sometimes these attitudes become more negative; sometimes children and adolescents do not show any changes in their attitudes to people from other cultures with increasing age.

Different factors influence the development of attitudes to people from other cultures, for instance:

- ▶ family discourse and practices in relationship to cultural groups;
- ▶ the contents of the school curriculum (that is, how issues related to racism and discrimination are covered);
- ▶ how cultural groups are represented in the mass media, especially television and cinema;
- ▶ personal contact with individuals from other cultures – including virtual contact through the internet.

- ▶ Reflect upon how you feel in connection with your own cultural and national group. For each of the following categories, write five keywords to explain what you have learnt from them about your own national or ethnic group: (a) family; (b) school; (c) mass media; (d) personal contact with individuals from other cultures.
- ▶ Compare how you feel towards your own ethnic and national groups with how you feel in connection with different ethnic and national groups. Think of two groups to which you don’t belong. What are your attitudes towards these groups and how have your attitudes been formed (for example from family, mass media, school, personal contact, contact through the internet)?

9. Functioning in a context of plurality: plurilingualism

- ▶ Think about the languages you speak. Share with others in the group how and when you learnt them and what they mean to you?

Plurilingualism is the ability of individuals to use two or more languages to communicate and participate in intercultural interaction, which implies communicating with people from other cultures including those who share a strong cultural identity with you (for example a national or regional identity) but who differ from you at least in one of the following aspects: ethnicity, religion, mother tongue, social class, region or similar.

Plurilingualism entails that:

- ▶ individuals have a degree of competence in one or more foreign languages;
- ▶ individuals speaking “the same” language are familiar with different varieties within it.

For example, if your first language is English, you may consider how speaking English from the London area differs from English in Newcastle. Similarly, you may also see British English in comparison with American, Australian or Indian English.

A plurilingual person has a varying degree of competence in different languages: you may master your mother tongue, have an intermediate command of one or two foreign languages and know only the basics in other languages.

- ▶ Do you consider yourself a plurilingual person? Read carefully the definition and reflect upon how the different elements of plurilingualism relate to you.
- ▶ Have you used your plurilingual skills to take part in intercultural communication? Think about examples in which speaking foreign languages or being familiar with different varieties of your first languages were key elements in your intercultural experiences.

10. Functioning in a context of plurality: pluriculturality and interculturality

A “pluricultural” person has the competences required to function within two or more cultures. Pluriculturality involves identifying with some of the values, beliefs and practices of two or more cultures, and acquiring the linguistic and behavioural competences necessary for participating in those cultures. Some pluricultural individuals are:

- ▶ the children born of mixed parentage (who frequently observe the distinctive cultural heritages of both parents);
- ▶ minority youth whose ethnic culture is very distinct from the prevailing national peer culture (they frequently adopt ethnic values and practices within the family at home and switch to the national peer culture outside the home).

Interculturality involves being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic towards people from (any) other cultures. Interculturality is the capacity to experience cultural otherness and use it to:

- ▶ reflect on matters that are usually taken for granted within one’s own culture and environment;
- ▶ evaluate one’s own everyday patterns of perception, thought, feeling and behaviour in order to develop greater self-knowledge and self-understanding;
- ▶ act as mediators among people of different cultures, to explain and interpret different perspectives.

Interculturality does not involve identifying with another cultural group or adopting the cultural practices of the other group.

- ▶ What do you think of the following statement?
In European societies, where there are communities identified by different linguistic varieties and different cultures, one may be plurilingual without necessarily being pluricultural. This is because while all speakers have a plurilingual repertoire, this does not necessarily make them aware of other cultures. Acquisition of a new linguistic variety provides an opportunity, but only an opportunity, to acquire some knowledge of other communities that use that variety.
- ▶ Would you define yourself as a pluricultural person? Do you have friends or relatives you consider pluricultural? Justify your answer and illustrate it with examples.
- ▶ Do you think you are an intercultural person? Do you have friends or relatives you consider intercultural? Justify your answer and illustrate it with examples.
- ▶ Does this statement have resonance in other parts of the world, not just Europe?

11. Active citizenship and intercultural citizenship

- ▶ How would you define yourself: as a citizen of your town/region, as a citizen of your country, as a European/Asian/South American/African/ or other citizen, as a citizen of the world? Discuss whether there is a type of citizenship you identify with most.

In order to participate in multicultural societies (see the definition of “multicultural societies”), individuals need plurilingual and intercultural competences (see the definitions of “plurilingualism”, “pluriculturalism” and “interculturality”).

Active citizenship involves participating in community life according to one’s rights and obligations. Active citizenship can take place at the local, regional, national and transnational level.

Intercultural and plurilingual competences are required in the development of active intercultural citizenship. Active intercultural citizenship allows us to engage with other citizens (whether of the same state or other states) and carry out action in multicultural communities at the multiplicity of levels mentioned above (local, regional, national and transnational).

- ▶ Comment on any instances in which you behaved as an active citizen of your school, region or nation (for example, fund raising for a charity).
- ▶ Have you had the chance to use your plurilingual and intercultural skills to show that you are an intercultural citizen? Add relevant examples or personal experiences.

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In the contemporary world, encounters with people from other cultural backgrounds have become part of our everyday lives. These intercultural encounters may be used as an opportunity to learn about other cultures, to develop our capacities for effective and respectful communication, to think about our own cultural affiliations and to reflect on ways in which we might take action for the common good.

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