

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Source

This activity was developed by Oana Nestian Sandu, based on the “Autobiography of intercultural encounters” (Council of Europe 2009a).

Themes

- ▶ Identity
- ▶ Culture
- ▶ Stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination
- ▶ Intercultural communication and dialogue

Competences addressed

- ▶ Attitudes: openness and curiosity towards diversity; tolerance of ambiguity
- ▶ Knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination; knowledge of cultural differences in communication
- ▶ Skills: empathy; dealing with conflicts

Complexity : Level 3

Group size : 4 to 30 people

Time : 90 minutes

Objectives

- ▶ To encourage participants to think about and learn from intercultural encounters they have had
- ▶ To identify potential stereotypes the participants have about others or that other people have about them
- ▶ To understand the complexity of intercultural relations
- ▶ To experience how attention to detail can counteract preconceived ideas.

Materials

Handout of the “Autobiography of intercultural encounters”.

Preparation

This activity can be preceded by the activity “Grandma, let me tell you about culture”. This way, participants can discuss different terms they will encounter in the autobiography and have a common understanding.

It can also be preceded by the activity “Do you see what I see?”, which shows how our perception is influenced by our background, world view and position in society.

Prepare a copy of the handout for each participant.

Instructions

1. This activity encourages participants to reflect on their intercultural encounters, from perception to feelings, from language to actions. Ask participants to think about when they met someone who was different from themselves in some way; for example, they were from another country or region, from a minority, had a different skin colour or religion, or spoke a different language.
2. Ask participants to take some time and answer the questions in the handout, by writing about the intercultural encounter of their choice. Give them about 30 minutes to do so. Mention that they do not need to answer questions one by one, but really tell the story of the encounter and try to cover in their writing the questions in the handout.

3. Now divide the participants into groups of four and ask them to tell each other their stories. Give groups about 30 minutes for the stories.

4. After the storytelling, ask participants to return to the big group and move to the debriefing.

Debriefing and evaluation

Use the following questions in the debriefing.

- ▶ What did participants think of the activity?
- ▶ Was it hard to remember and describe an intercultural encounter?
- ▶ In what way did the guiding questions help them to think about aspects people did not consider before?
- ▶ Are the encounters presented by the other participants surprising in any way? Why?
- ▶ Has the participants' perception of a particular group changed because of the encounter or since the encounter? If yes, how?
- ▶ In what way does this activity help participants think about how stereotypes function?
- ▶ In what way does it help participants think about their own behaviour in an intercultural situation?
- ▶ Did the encounters presented by the others stimulate further reflection on their own intercultural encounters? How?
- ▶ Can they identify, based on this activity, what competences people need in intercultural encounters?

Tips for facilitators

Participants might choose to describe intercultural encounters that generated strong emotions. Be prepared to handle such situations and inform participants beforehand about there being no obligation to respond to some questions, if they choose not to.

Some participants might express negativity or hostility towards "the other" described in the autobiography. Do not let these attitudes go unaddressed. It is important to "practise what you preach" and use this opportunity to discuss stereotypes and the importance of respecting cultural diversity.

Variations

Participants can also respond to the questions by writing about the intercultural encounter as a story.

Suggestions for follow-up

This activity can be followed by "Me, myself and we", an activity in which participants reflect upon their identity and intercultural relations and introduce themselves in creative ways.

Handouts



1. **About the encounter** – When did it happen, what were you doing when it happened?
2. **The person you met** – Who was it? What did you notice about this person? What did they look like? How was the person dressed? What did the person do?
3. **Communication** – How did you communicate? How was it? Was it easy to make yourself understood? Was it easy for them to understand you? Why or why not? Did you have to change the way you communicate usually?
4. **Feelings and thoughts** – How did you find this encounter? How did you feel at the time? How did you feel about the other person? Why? Would you like to see the other person again? Why or why not? How do you think the other person felt at the time? Do you think you and the other person felt the same way when you met?
5. **Learning** – What do you think you have learned or discovered from meeting this person? Would you like to meet them again and spend some time together? If you met them again, would you do anything different from last time? If you met them again, is there anything you would like to ask them? Do you think meeting this person has changed you in any way?

Adapted from the "Autobiography of intercultural encounters", available at:

www.coe.int/t/DG4/AUTOBIOGRAPHY/AutobiographyTool_en.asp