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Culture Shock and Dealing with the Impact of Cultural Differences in Our Classrooms

by  
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# CULTURE SHOCK IN THE CLASSROOM

## Abstract

The number of immigrant students continues to grow from all corners of the world. With the student population growing even more diverse, teachers need a clearer understanding of culture shock and its different stages. Not only do students face linguistic challenges when entering the American classroom, but they are also confronted with socio-cultural differences. Informed educators can prevent or reduce anxiety from the stress of culture shock and allow for an environment where effective instruction and learning can take place. More can be done to empower educators to deal with the culture shock that is prevalent and growing in today's classroom. The PD is designed for all teachers working with ELLs to better understand culture shock with its the stages, symptoms, and effects. With this knowledge, educators can be better prepared for assisting and supporting the ELLs who experience culture shock. Empowering teachers and ELLs with proper training about culture shock and its impact in our classrooms is essential to language, socio-cultural contexts and assessments.

*Keywords:* culture shock, English Language Learners, newcomers, adaptation strategies, cross-cultural, ENL teachers, immigrant schooling

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# CULTURE SHOCK IN THE CLASSROOM

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Problem Statement

Few American educators have emigrated to a foreign country and settled abroad. I doubt that many have experienced uprooting from a familiar place and leaving loved ones behind or have had to face culture shock. Only a small percentage of educators could truly identify with students who are going through this cultural acclimatization, where a new culture is encountered. As immigrants transition into a new country, language, and environment, little support is offered to help them adjust. These newcomers may not even realize what they are experiencing or cannot express feelings appropriately to reach out for help. When a person's physical and cultural environment changes, the individual may feel disorientated. This drastic transition can make one feel anxious and confused. One would think that all the uncertainties of a "new life" can be overwhelming to a newcomer.

I believe that teachers are in the frontline position to help newcomers adjust to their new surroundings. Students spend hours a day at school, initially facing strangers. Not only are they around foreign people, but they are hearing a strange language, experiencing and seeing different things, in new surroundings. My point is that teachers can be instrumental in facilitating cultural acclimatization, and thereby minimize anxiety.

### Significance of the Problem

Research shows that anxiety can affect scholastic performance adversely (Palmer, 1996). Disorientation and feelings of isolation can further aggravate the problem. Students who are experiencing these feelings associated with culture shock, cannot focus on their school work as they should.

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The silent period has been documented, when students do not talk much as they are thought to be taking in their new surroundings. Could this silent period be shortened, if culture shock was addressed? Could English Language Learners (ELLs) adjust sooner with more support and understanding from their teachers? Teachers can offer so much more than just teaching the curriculum. They are in the position to serve the needs of the students in front of them. By studying culture shock, a better understanding of the stages, symptoms, and its affects, will be gained. With this knowledge, educators can be better prepared for assisting and supporting the ELLs who experience culture shock. My point is that more can be done to empower educators to deal with the culture shock that is prevalent and growing in today's classroom.

### **Purpose**

This capstone project compiles a professional development (PD) workshop for English as a New Language (ENL) educators who work with newcomers, and for all classroom teachers who will be working with them. Culture shock and its symptoms will be studied to gain a deeper understanding of what newcomer students will be experiencing. The PD developed for all teachers of ELLs will give them insight into culture shock, how to recognize it, and how to best support the student as they adjust to their new life here in the States.

### **Summary and Transition**

By researching the impact of facing cultural differences and the effects of culture shock, a better understanding of the struggles associated with acculturation can be gained. Being able to recognize what factors play a role can help both student and teacher. With the knowledge of its characteristics and the different phases of culture shock, a more strategic plan for lending support can be established.

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From a deeper understanding of culture shock, ways to manage it can be developed by looking particularly at our young student population who are in need of support.

From information and research gathered, a professional development workshop for educators will be developed. This workshop will inform, enlighten, and educate teachers about culture shock.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

An ELL's identity is going through change as they face the challenge of leaving their home country. These students are adapting to different norms and a new culture, and this is all set in a new educational landscape (Ng, Haslam, Haslam & Cruwys, 2017). Through careful research of literature on this topic, a deeper insight will be gained about how educators can better assist students, as they transition to a new culture. Teachers will learn about practical ways to help immigrant students acclimatize, which in turn will enhance their learning experiences. After the literature review, a PD for educators will be shared.

#### **Origin of the Term "Culture Shock"**

This term was first used by Kalervo Oberg, a Canadian anthropologist, in 1954. He first used it during a talk for women, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Oberg was born in 1901, in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, to Finnish immigrant parents. He traveled, lived and worked in various countries. Based on personal experiences and firsthand understanding of living among different cultures, Oberg (1954) first coined the term "culture shock" and described it as:

... an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad. Like most ailments, it has its own etiology, symptoms, and cure. Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and

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one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. Now these cues which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness (p.1).

### **Culture Shock as a Phenomenon**

Webster's dictionary (2002) describes culture as "the customary belief, social forms, and material traits of racial, religious, or social group; also the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as the diversions or way of life) shared by people in a place or time" (p.173). Shock is "a sudden severe effect on the mind or emotions; to disturb the emotions or mind of; horrify; disgust. Combining these two terms, culture shock is "a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation" (p. 676). Hall (1959) expressed that "learning to learn differently is something that has to be faced every day by people who go overseas..." (p. 103).

Recent reviews on research conducted claims that social factors along with English proficiency, were used as the main predictors of sociocultural adjustment and psychological symptoms. The amount of time that an individual spends in a new country, plays a role in the

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adjustment process. Another factor that influences adaptability is the interaction with mainstream society (Wang, Wei & Chen, 2015).

Teaching across cultures can be challenging. Teachers may find themselves in unfamiliar waters where their own teaching practices differ greatly to the ones that their ELL students are accustomed to. “Educators must be able to take into account the culture of the child, to understand the notion of cultural relativity, and to discard ethnocentrism.... Teaching approaches that work in one cultural context may not necessarily work in another” (Madrid, Baldwin & Belbase, 2016, p. 337).

Lynn Chang (2014) observed the different behavior she first encountered in the classroom, during her first week of school, in the United States. Sharing her story, reveals just how difficult confronting a new culture can be. Chang had come to attend a Doctoral Seminar in Tennessee, before moving on to completing her studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia. To her, she felt “like a lost child in the darkness”. This statement illustrates the inner turmoil experienced by those who are going through culture shock. More question filled Chang’s mind: “How come students were allowed to eat in the class? Why were teachers called by their first name, and not by their titles? Why do the students not raise their hands when they would like to talk?” (p. 402). She reports that she cried a lot during that first week, as she searched for “any light to fit in the class”. Coming from Taiwan, Chang was educated to listen in class, to be humble, and only talk if she had carefully thought of the words she would say. She was praised for being a quiet and patient girl. Other girls who talked too much were often asked to “act like a lady”. The American classroom is so different, where talking is encouraged. For Chang, it was tough however. After she carefully put her thoughts together, the discussion had moved on to the next topic, and she felt left behind. The stark differences that are encountered during the

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initial settling period, creates a certain amount of inner conflict. Some students cannot see themselves acting in a certain way, yet long to fit in with the new culture.

Developing friendships is another obstacle that ELLs face. An example that this newcomer shares is when, for the first time, somebody asked her “How are you doing?”, Chang started to tell them. The person walked off and left Chang wondering why she had asked, if she did not want to listen to a reply. In Taiwan, one would only ask that if one intended to have a conversation. Chang understands now that it is a form of a greeting and seldom a conversation starter. She was hesitant to interact with Americans, as she was unsure of how to approach them. She was afraid that her English would not be understood or that she may offend someone. She patiently waited for others to reach out to her. These vignettes from the experiences of Chang, as a new comer, illustrate that forming friendships can be difficult for ELLs. Feelings of isolation can trigger anxiety which in turn can adversely affect learning.

Chang came to realize that American students are much like her, and do not quite know how to interact with international students. Local Americans also choose to be passive and so the chances of mingling are slim. Most internationals tend to segregate themselves with the people from their home country, where it feels more comfortable. Sadly, barriers get built. Chang (2014) comments that “once we have begun to really understand another people by mastering their language, we will still find hidden barriers which separate one people from another” (p. 405). The retelling of Chang’s experience sheds light on just how challenging it can be to navigate social interactions in a new country.

### **Other Terms Associated with Culture Shock**

The literature on culture shock indicates that students often feel a sense of vulnerability when experience culture shock. This arose from feeling lonely, stressed and isolated. This in

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turn had social and psychological implications that affected language acquisition (Kim & Okazaki, 2014).

Culture shock is often associated with other terms like the following:

**Acculturative stress.** Acculturative stress refers to the anxiety experienced during the process of acculturation. Learning how to behave differently, in order that behavior is viewed as appropriate, is part of adapting to acculturation. Matusitz (2015) discussed that acculturative stressors include anxiety, changes in socio-economic standing, feelings of loss, resentment, grief, isolation, discrimination, alienation, depression and pressure from family. Studies show that these issues have often lead to mental health problems.

It is noted that adapting to a new culture is accompanied by cultural conflict. Factors such as discrimination and prejudice and stereotyping are often encountered. Students may also experience negative nonverbal cues that send the message of intolerance. (Matusitz, 2015).

**Linguistic limitations.** Linguistic limitations often form part of the culture shock. English language proficiency is key to social integration as well as social interaction. Studies researched by Matusitz (2015) claim that students who experience less culture shock are those who have better linguistic skills. Contact with Americans is sometimes limited due to language capabilities. Sadly, communication can be inhibited due to the fear of being misunderstood or saying something that may not make perfect sense.

Further studies documented by Matusitz (2015) reports that foreign students feel that their poor language ability is the primary factor in becoming socially involved as they feel that it takes too much effort for an American to understand them.

**Cultural adjustment.** “Struggles with intercultural relations are timeless and universal” (Kissinger, 2014, p. 42). According to Orta, Murguia & Cruz, (2019) cultural adjustment can

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include the following four stages: cultural separation from home (not just physical separation), culture shock, social marginalization and then finally integration. Haung, Calzada, Cheng,

Barajas-Gonzales & Brotman (2017) also talk about the four categories of cultural adaption:

Acculturation and enculturation interacting to result in one of four categories, including (1) assimilation, or low participation on one's culture of origin (i.e. low enculturation) combined with high participation in the new culture (i.e., high acculturation); (2) separation, or low participation on one's new culture (i.e. low acculturation) combined with high participation in the culture of origin (i.e., high enculturation); (3) marginalization, or low participation in both the culture of origin and the new culture (i.e., low acculturation and enculturation); and (4) integration or biculturalism, or the simultaneous participation on one's culture of origin and the new culture (i.e., high acculturation and enculturation). (p. 573).

**Symptoms of culture shock.** Culture shock does not affect everybody in the exact same way. However, most ELLs do experience it in some form or another. Symptoms are varied and can last for a short while, or a longer period of time. These symptoms could be social, emotional or physiological. They include:

Feeling isolated, sad or helpless

Being bored

Withdrawal (to avoid locals) or giving excuses for staying indoors

Irritation and other minor frustrations

Body pains and various aches

Homesickness

A critical attitude about local customs

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Feelings of vulnerability, depression or anger

Insomnia

Constant complaining about climate

Trying too hard to adapt by becoming obsessed with the new culture

Doubts about moving to the new culture

Pressing need to talk to “those who really understand me”

Hostility and irritability

Frustration with language and communication

Regression (in younger children, e.g. bed-wetting)

Excessive clinginess

Changes in play habits

Mood swings

Abnormal fear of discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice

Left unchecked, a student may develop depression, or turn to some form of “escape”, like drugs or alcohol. Educators are in the position to view symptoms of culture shock. With the correct understanding of this phenomenon, they can lend support to the student and help during this challenging time.

In one study, Shannon-Baker (2015) reflects on how students dealt with culture shock by analyzing their art and journal entries as they settled in a new country. It revealed varied emotions, and these different emotions were sometimes experienced at the same time.

### **Stages of Culture Shock**

A study conducted by Paul Pedersen (1995) in the nineties, at the University of Pittsford, describes the stages of culture shock in five stages. Pedersen is viewed as a pioneer researcher

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when it comes to cross-cultural psychology. These stages are helpful in understanding what ELLs may be going through.

**Honeymoon stage.** Just as the name implies, this is a great stage to go through where memories of everything that is familiar from the home country, are still fresh. The differences found with the new culture are intriguing and there is a sense of excitement. Coupled with feelings of anticipation, are feelings of euphoria, curiosity and joy are often experienced during this stage, which Cupsa (2018) calls “the rising stage”. These positive emotions override anxiety about the unknown territory. For some, they feel like a visitor as they explore new surroundings.

For individuals who have been forced to flee their home country, this stage is one of relief as their search for safety is over. For refugees, this journey may have been a matter of life and death. Some may feel that they need to pick up the pieces of their lives and start rebuilding. Even though this is a dream come true, many do feel disillusioned when they encounter grief, trauma and loss as well. As the changes and their implications emerge, many feel a loss of identity and a sense of belonging.

**Disintegration stage.** Pedersen (1995) calls this second stage “disintegration”. I have also heard it referred to as the “irritability and hostility stage”, where the new culture no longer seems as exciting as it once was. The new culture seems confusing and frustration develops. There is a sense of being disconnected to surroundings. The differences between the home- and new culture become more obvious.

Cupsa (2018) echoed that this stage was like walking around in someone else’s shoes and that the shoes did not fit well at all. Could you imagine walking around for a whole day, in high-heeled boots that were too small for you, in the middle of summer? There would be blisters and

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pain; confusion, loneliness and irritation. The newness of everything has gone, and feelings of isolation are experienced. The sense of loss of familiarity and additional loss of family support can be overwhelming. I would call this “the crisis and distress stage”. Many realize that their English language is not good enough and feel insecure. Homesickness sets in, along with doubt. Some even experience physical symptoms such as headaches and body pain.

This loss of familiarity can come with feelings of confusion. Not knowing what is expected of one, only adds to the sense of disconnection experienced. Withdrawal and isolation often take place due to the complexity of these feelings.

**Reintegration stage.** Cupsa (2018) has a term for this reintegration stage that she called, “learning to walk again”. She noted that this stage “is characterized by increased hostility and anger directed towards others.... This manifest as strong rejection of the host culture with the polarized experience of everything being good that comes from the home culture and everything being bad in the new culture” (p. 188).

Some may show signs of disliking the new culture, the language and the food and see it as being inferior. Prejudices towards the new culture may be present and some idealize their former way of life with their familiar culture. Gradually, as struggles are confronted, a shift seems to take place.

Along with the struggles of this stage, an individual may grow more at ease with handling the different demands or tasks. A new routine gets established and there is a sense of knowing what to expect.

Less energy is required to adjust during this stage and there is a growing acceptance of the new way of life. There is often an expanding language ability, where one can interact with more ease than before. There are fewer surprises encountered, as surroundings becoming more

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familiar. By this stage, one has developed tools to help with the new encounters. There is a sense of connecting your value and cultures to the new place you are now in.

**Autonomy stage.** Pedersen calls this stage autonomy. It has also been called the “Independence or Assimilation stage” or “Juggling” (Capsa 2018). This is where the individual starts feeling more at home in the new country. Experiences have been gained, which has given the individual insight into adjusting into new culture. There is a certain level of organizing these experiences, that enhance the development of new perspectives and skills.

Differences are no longer seen as threatening and they do not appear as big as they once were. In this stage there is “little of the illusion of the first stage nor the pain of the second stage nor the anger of the third stage but rather a synthesis in a more complex role but also a competent role for the student...” (Pedersen, 1995, p. 243).

During this stage, one may start feeling at home as a bi-cultural individual. An appreciation for both the home country and the new country can be developed. There is an understanding how these two cultures differ and how they are similar. There is a sense of belonging and acceptance; maybe even a comfort-level that has not been reached before. A sensitivity to the new culture may grow, along with confidence. Feelings of isolation fade and there is an appreciation for the progress that has been made to settling in; a more relaxed feeling, and a more balanced and objective view of time spent in the new country (Swallow, 2010).

**Interdependence stage.** This is the stage where isolation and loneliness no longer play a role. There is an acceptance, and even an embracing, of the new culture. Daily life starts to be enjoyed. A new level of confidence is reached. Making decisions, based on preferences and values, becomes easier.

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This is a place where new perspectives can be developed between self and the new culture (Cupsa 2018). Integration takes place and a new identity starts to emerge. A greater flexibility has developed and there is less inner turmoil, as the stress of change dissipates. There is a reconstruction of a new self, with a new, bicultural identity. Feeling of being at home grows, along with integration and adaptability.

By having an understanding of these stages of culture shock, educators can be aware of these different adaptation milestones students may find themselves. Armed with deeper insight into culture shock, the next chapter will include a professional development on this topic for teachers. It will better equip them to support their ELLs as they develop their new bi-cultural identity as they go through the stages of culture shock.

### **Chapter 3: Professional Development**

#### **Description of the Product**

Seldom do educators have experience with culture shock. It makes one wonder who can truly identify with ELLs' experiences in American schools and classrooms. By sharing insight gathered from research, and from personal stories of students, a greater understanding of culture shock can be gained. With a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, teachers can identify the symptoms and provide ways to best support their students. Matusitz (2015) claims that acculturative stressors include anxiety, alienation, depression and feelings of loss, and these have lead to mental health problems. This Professional Development workshop will be devised for ENL and non-ENL teachers to provide a deeper understanding of culture shock. The stages of culture shock will be shared, adaptation strategies will be discussed to better equip practitioners working with ELLs as they adjust to life in a new culture. Kim & Okazaki (2014) claim that

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feelings of loneliness, stress and isolation had social and psychological implications that affected language acquisition.

A case study from a student will be used to share firsthand experiences of culture shock and what was helpful for lending support as ELLs deal with culture shock. The information researched and gathered will be shared via a PowerPoint presentation. This will include information from Chapters 1 & 2, as well as from case studies done while working with ELLs.

### **Content of Professional Development (PD)**

**Agenda.** Hand out the agenda for this PD session. This gives participants the learning target and goals for this ninety-minute session. Besides giving the participants something to read as they wait for the session to start, it also states objectives (see Appendix A, Figure 1).

**Introduction of speaker.** The speaker/ presenter will be introduced. This is a customary practice at most seminars. Listeners like to know information about the speaker, such as his/her passion for, and experience in a specific field. The introduction is a start to building a connection with the audience.

**Intended goals.** Go over the following learning goals from the agenda.

Educators will:

1. Gain a better understanding of culture shock and its symptoms.
2. Acquire knowledge about the different stages of culture shock.
3. Collaborate about strategies to best support ELLs experiencing culture shock.

Learning needs to be meaningful. By setting specific goals, participants know what the intended purpose and outcome is for this training session.

**Icebreaker activity.** Icebreaker activities are often used as an introductory activity to help the audience feel more comfortable. Having a visual illustration can help the audience to

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understand a concept being portrayed. To illustrate what happens when two cultures come together, take two different colors of Play-doh. Blue- and red Play-Doh works well. The red represents the home country and the blue represents the new country. When these two worlds meet (mix the blue and red Play-doh), the individual is no longer just red or just blue. Instead, as these two colors mix, a new color, purple, develops. This individual is no longer just blue or just red, but rather a mixture of both. So it is with ELLs in our classrooms. They are no longer just Somali (red), for example, as they now live in a new culture, but they will never be just American (blue), because of their origin. The new color purple, from mixing red and blue, represents the new bicultural identity. As ELLs turn from blue to purple, they need support and understanding as they settle down to a new and different life in America.

This visual illustration using Play-Doh can also be used to help introduce and explain the concept of culture shock to students. This can be an opportunity to let ELLs know that as teachers, we are aware of the challenges they face as they transition to a new culture. This can be an apt time to remind ELLs that if they need someone to talk to, they can reach out to a teacher or counselor.

Participants will now complete a Venn diagram exercise (see Appendix A, Figure 2). In the one circle, they will write at least three things that are unique to America and its culture. In the other circle, they will choose a different country and list three unique factors about that country and its culture. Where the circles intersect, they will record three things that both cultures have in common. Participants will then share their Venn diagram with a partner.

PDs are moving away from lectures and participants want to be engaged and participate in the workshop. By answering questions, completing group exercises and sharing ideas, learners are more engaged during the training.

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**Sharing cultural differences.** Speaker will share a story of one of her experiences about cultural differences (see Appendix A, Figure 3). Participants will then break into groups of four to six individuals. They will get to share some personal experiences of cultural clashes or other issues that they have encountered in their classrooms. Analyzing linguistic challenges that ELLs face, as well as different socio-cultural factors will allow for a valuable exchange of professional enrichment.

Group work gives the opportunity to learn from each other. It allows for more opportunity of conversation, and for participants to share experiences and ideas, that may be difficult or too time-consuming to do in a big group setting.

**A closer look at a case study.** Continuing to work in small groups, read the abbreviated case study provided (see Appendix A, Figure 4) and discuss the questions about the case study (see Appendix A, Figure 5)

**PowerPoint presentation.** (see Appendix A, Figure 9). “Struggles with intercultural relations are timeless and universal” (Kissinger, 2014). One may not escape these struggles, but strategies to deal with these struggles can be refined and use to better deal with these struggles.

The PowerPoint presentation will include the history of the term “culture shock” (see Appendix A, Figure 6), as well as its different stages and some adaptation strategies. Through collaborative problem-solving, the audience will come up with even more practical ways to lend support to ELLs experiencing culture shock. With this support, academic outcomes will be improved because students feel safe to participate, and use English, no matter their level.

The goal is to have teachers leave the PD with a deeper understanding of culture shock and to have practical strategies to lend support to new ELLs. Through collaboration during the PD, teachers can share challenges encountered and discuss possible solutions. New ways for

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lending support can be devised together in the small groups. Through educating teachers about culture shock, ELLs can be reassured that what they are experiencing is normal. Each individual is different and experiences culture shock in a unique way.

How often have ELLs experienced similar awkward interactions? How often do our new ELLs, who are already homesick, not only battle to understand what is happening around them, but also battle to be understood? Matusitz (2015) reports that ELLs feel that their poor language ability is the main reason that prevents them from becoming socially involved and that it is just too difficult to make an American understand them.

Dealing with a myriad of feelings, our ELLs often bear a heavy load is easily overlooked. Think of *not* being able to say what you would like to say. Think about being worried if you will be ridiculed for making mistakes when you open your mouth to talk. Think about being totally lost sitting in a place where you cannot follow along. Think about feeling so very lonely and isolated, and feeling that there was nowhere to escape to. This would be a heavy load for any one of us, never mind for a young child or teenager. By developing an understanding of the turmoil that ELLs can face, even though it is not always visible, we can better support them as they adjust to life here in the States. Link to the PowerPoint presentation is available in Appendix A, Figure 9.

**Collaborative problem-solving strategies.** Participants will be given a list of some culture shock symptoms and have to come up with practical ways to support ELLs. (see Appendix A, Figure 7). Teachers will leave feeling better prepared to support their ELLs with concrete ways to help them adjust to life in a new culture.

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**Assessment exercise.** This questionnaire (see Appendix A, Figure 8) is used to determine if learning goals were met. Questions will also be asked in order to improve this PD for future use.

### **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

#### **Tasks Completed and Information Gained**

By researching culture shock, I have gained a deeper understanding of what it entails, and its impact on learning. I obtained background information on when it was first used, who the first person was to use it, and when it was first talked about. I now have a deeper understanding about how this phenomenon can create anxiety for ELLs, which in turn can affect scholastic performance, socio-emotional relations and performance in assessments. I have reflected back on my own experiences when encountering culture shock and have been able to analyze the stages of culture shock that I went through. I now can recognize the stages that students in my classroom are going through and have learned new adaptation strategies to share with these students and practitioners working with the ELL population as they settle into a new culture.

#### **Implications for ENL and Non-ENL Teachers**

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) states that the teaching work force is mostly white and female. The student population grows more and more diverse, which makes cross-cultural training important for both ENL and non-ENL teachers. Educators need to know that crossing cultures is tough; really tough. Educators often focus their attention on getting through the curriculum and/or “fixing” the language problem of the ELL. Gaskins (2015) expressed that it cannot be stressed enough that teachers should not underestimate an ELL’s capabilities; their potential should not be based on their English language proficiency. There is more to schooling than perfect English and academics. ELLs

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have faced emotional turmoil after being uprooted from their home culture and been placed in an unfamiliar setting, where they face much change.

A knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture shock gives educators insight into how best to support ELLs. Understanding the different stages of culture shock, teachers need adaptation strategies to share with their students in order to help minimize the impact of culture shock. It is important for teachers to acknowledge its existence and be able to recognize its symptoms and stages, so that socio-cultural stresses may be minimized, second language acquisition can be promoted, which in turn will improve the outcomes in high stake assessments.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

Helping students understand that their feelings of loss, sadness or loneliness is a normal part of the process of settling down in a new culture, will enable them to better process and deal with these changes. Students need to understand that the stages of culture shock are a part of the process of settling in a new country and that each individual goes through these stages at their own pace.

Educators are in the front-line position to lend support to students who are navigating a new culture. Students need to know that their teachers are approachable, and that, educators understand that transitioning between cultures is challenging. By reducing anxiety of students, educators are able to apply themselves better to the tasks at hand.

Students in general need to know that diversity is celebrated and something to embrace. ELLs in particular need to be encouraged to be proud of their heritage. Students need to be encouraged that culture shock can build confidence as personal values and beliefs are established. Culture shock can cause one to look at the world in a more sophisticated way.

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### **Further Research Needed**

With the growing numbers of immigrants arriving in America from all over the world, researching specific difficulties or challenges faced by specific groups e.g. Somalis, would be helpful in lending the best support. By understanding the cultural clashes of specific groups, better help can be offered as students navigate this transition from one culture to another.

Understanding the structure of a first language, can be helpful in how ELLs will process English as a New Language (ENL). Studying customs will also assist in how we can support ELLs as they make new friends and develop socially.

### **Final Thoughts**

Culture shock is not something we need to try and fix, but rather something to be understood and supported. It is part of the process that ELLs will face as they confront a new culture. We all need to be encouraged that culture shock can build confidence as personal values and beliefs are established. Culture shock can cause one to look at the world in a more sophisticated way. Educators can play a vital supportive role to help ELLs as they transition into a new culture. ELLs should be encouraged to know their roots and develop a personal pride in both their cultural heritage and their new country.

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# CULTURE SHOCK IN THE CLASSROOM

## Appendix A

Figure 1. Professional Development Agenda

### **Outcome**

Educators will gain knowledge and insight about culture shock and its stages and will develop skills and strategies to identify and support ELLs experiencing culture shock.

### **Identification of Issues**

1. Educators receive little cross-cultural training. With the diverse student population growing, the need for this type of training increases.
2. Very few teachers can personally identify with culture shock. Educators need to know how culture shock can affect learning.
3. Practical ways need to be devised in order to support ELLs experiencing culture shock, and why this is important to ELLs' academic success.

### **Learning Goals**

Educators will:

1. Gain a better understanding of culture shock and its symptoms.
2. Acquire knowledge about the different stages of culture shock.
3. Collaborate and learn about strategies to best support ELLs experiencing culture shock.

### **Agenda Items**

Introduction of speaker (2 minutes).

Play-Doh illustration of two cultures colliding (3 minutes).

Venn Diagram exercise, with pair and share.

Sharing a personal story about cultural differences in a small-group setting, then with whole group (20 minutes).

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A look at part of a case study – open discussion on what can be learned from it.

PowerPoint presentation - A closer look at cultural shock (30 minutes).

Collaborative problem-solving: adapting strategies and ways to lend support (20 minutes).

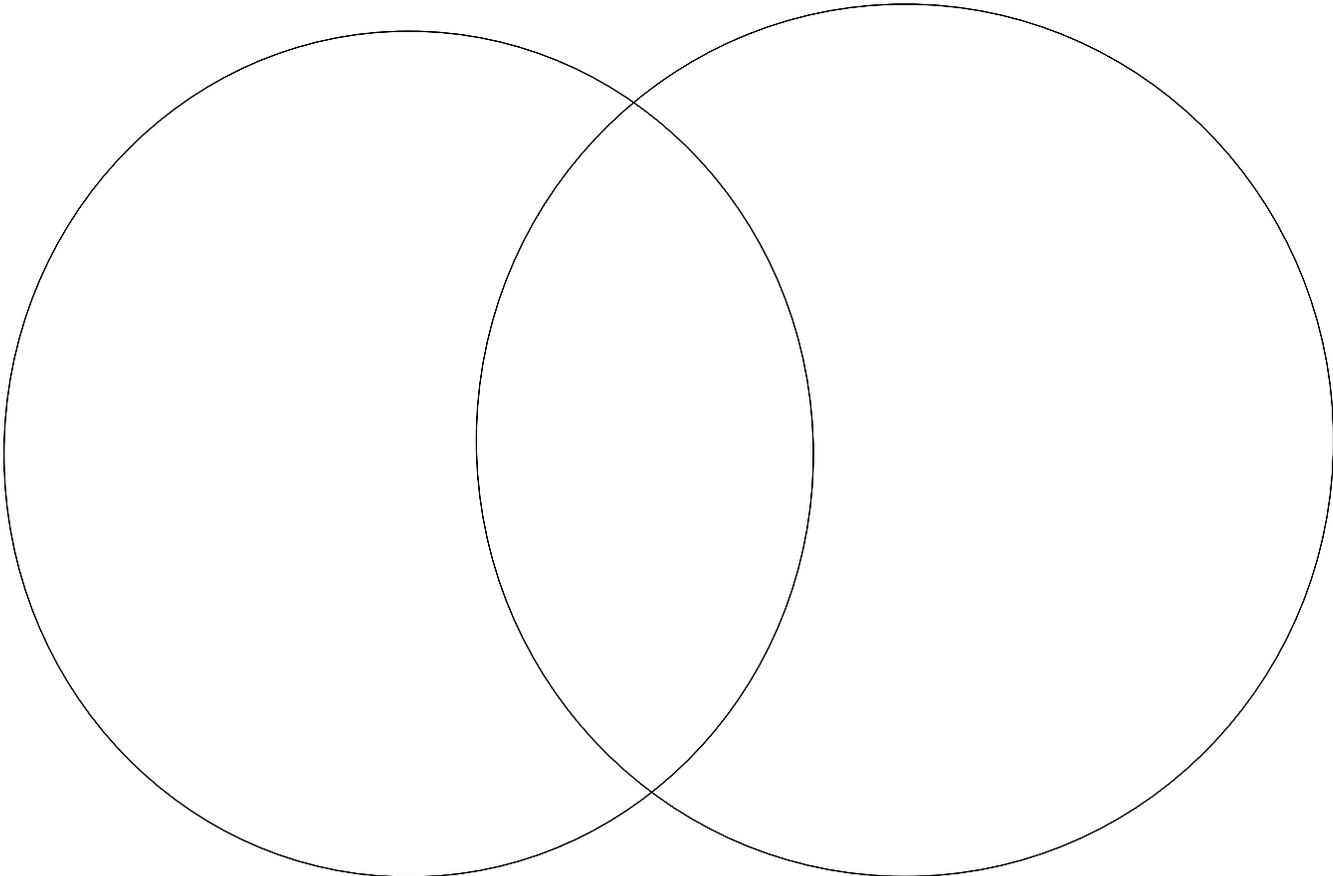
Assessment Exercise (15 minutes)

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Figure 2. Venn Diagram

Home Culture

New Culture



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### Figure 3. A Personal Story

I remember the first time that I went to Wegmans. Firstly, I have to say, that I had driven past the store a number of times and wondered what kind of store it was. You see, back home in South Africa, we know that Checkers, Hyperama or Pick-n-pay are grocery stores. I had never before heard of a Wegmans and only when we spoke to some locals, did we learn that it was a grocery store. I eagerly went to the store the next day, after hearing how proud these “Rochesterians” are of Wegmans. As I was waiting in line to pay for my groceries, I was thinking about how much money I had in my purse. As the person in front of me completed their purchase, I started unpacking my groceries.

The cashier looked at me and asked, “Paper or plastic?”. I smiled back at her and told her that I would pay in cash. With a confused look on her face, she repeated the question. This time, I took out my money and showed her what I would be paying with. She looked even more befuddled. She then picked up a paper bag and a plastic bag show me my options for holding groceries.

You see, South Africans call credit cards, “plastic money”. After all, the actual card is made of plastic and often people do not have real (actual) money, use their credit card. I thought she was asking if I would be paying with cash (paper) or credit (plastic).

I chuckled and said, “either”, which was not helpful to the poor cashier. She proceeded to put a paper bag in a plastic bag. Back in South Africa, we could only buy plastic bags for our groceries. Now, I was getting twice as many bags than actually needed, and that all for free. I remember how I had mixed feelings about this. Yay for free bags, yet it seemed so wasteful. Such mixed feelings would often happen during the first couple of years after moving to this

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great country. The novelty of seeing snow and playing in it for the first time was magical. However, I could only last outside for minutes before I could no longer stand the cold.

I share this story to illustrate how even a simple trip to the store made me feel embarrassed and I remember wondering what other things would make me feel that way again.

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Figure 4. Abbreviated Case Study

### **Introduction**

Pritina is thirteen years old. She will be going into 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She was born in Taiz, Yemen. Her home language is Arabic. She is the youngest of seven children. She came to America as a refugee three years ago, at the age of ten. She lives with her mother and four of her siblings. Her father has his own apartment elsewhere, but visits them regularly. She counts herself as fortunate to have survived and escaped the horror of her city being invaded and bombed. She says that she has come to accept that this is her new life. It is not as exciting as it was the first few months, but she also is not irritated anymore by the new culture.

Pritina tells of how her older sisters fought for her to go to school. They were not fortunate enough to go to school themselves, but they advocated for her to be able to attend school. It was her eagerness to learn and her older sisters' insistence, that eventually led to her father agreeing that she could go to school. She attended school from age seven through nine, until the invasion of her city brought that to an end. Pritina is classified as a SIFE (student with interrupted formal education), as she could not attend school for about a year, before she immigrated to the States.

### **Linguistic Challenges**

Pritina can communicate really well and “speaks the best English in her family”. She often has to translate for them. However, she is aware that she lags behind in her academic writing. Even though her verbal communication is not a problem, her spelling and writing reveal otherwise. However, if she reads for comprehension, she has to slow down and may read a sentence a few times in order to grasp its meaning. Her writing skills are still developing and this seems to be the area that needs the most attention. She says that she always feels “stupid”

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because she cannot keep up with her L1 peers at school. She feels frustrated as any writing exercise takes her much longer to complete.

### **Socio-cultural Context' Impacts**

Pritina is Muslim and wears a hijab every day. She also wears long skirts or dresses. Her arms are also covered at all times. She says that she is tired of being asked if she is hot.

Pritina is well-liked by her peers. She is friendly and confident. The other two Arabic students in class often ask her for a word in English and I can tell that this boosts her confidence. If she does not know a word in English, she is not afraid to ask or use translating software on her phone, to find the word.

### **Complexity of Assessment and Evaluation**

There is no record of a NYSISTEL score. For her first NYSESLAT test in 2017, she scored a 200/99. The following year, her second NYSESLAT score increased to 252/99. She moved from emerging to transitioning, which reflects her great progress.

Pritina's verbal communication is good, but more time is needed for the development of her academic writing.

### **Research Strategies**

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) account for social interaction with others. This takes up to two years to develop. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) takes place when writing skills such as comparing, evaluating and synthesizing uses correct academic language. This takes five to seven years to develop.

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Figure 5. Discussion Questions for Case Study

1. What stage of culture shock would you say Pritina find herself in?
2. How would you rate her linguistic development?
3. What can be done to help her develop her CALP?
4. List some effective support strategies for Pritina moving forward.

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Figure 6. History of the Term “Culture Shock”

This term was first used by Kalervo Oberg, a Canadian anthropologist, in 1954. He first used it during a talk for women, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Oberg was born in 1901, in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, to Finnish immigrant parents. He traveled, lived and worked in various countries. Based on personal experiences and firsthand understanding of living among different cultures, Oberg (1954) first coined the term “culture shock” and described it as:

... an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad. Like most ailments, it has its own etiology, symptoms, and cure. Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. Now these cues which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness

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Figure 7. Symptoms- and Support of Culture Shock

Symptom	Ways to support
Being silent, not talking	
Homesickness	
Feelings of sadness and isolation	
Trying too hard to adapt by becoming obsessed with the new culture	

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Figure 8. Assessment Questionnaire

1. How many stages of culture shock are there?
2. Why is it important to know about culture shock?
3. What are some symptoms of culture shock?
4. List ways to support our ELLs experiencing culture shock.
5. Rate the following out of 10:
  - a. Play-Doh illustration
  - b. Small Group work
  - c. PowerPoint presentation
  - d. Insight gained from small group sharing

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Figure 9. Link to PowerPoint PD

<https://voicethread.com/myvoice/thread/12796466/77128841/71649171>

# CULTURE SHOCK IN THE CLASSROOM

## Appendix B

### **Introduction**

I met Pritina (not her real name) during a five-week summer Literacy Language Program. This program is offered only to ELLs and all instruction is given in English. It was easy to select Pritina for this case study. It is wonderful to see a young lady so eager to learn; someone so very thankful to be able to attend school.

Pritina is thirteen years old. This coming fall, she will be going into 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She was born in Taiz, Yemen. Her home language is Arabic. She is the youngest of seven children. She has three brothers and three sisters. She came to America as a refugee three years ago, at the age of ten. She counts herself as fortunate to have survived and escaped the horror of her city being invaded and bombed.

Here in the States, Pritina lives with her mother, two of her sisters, one of whom has a baby, and two of her brothers. Her other two siblings are married and live in Yemen. Pritina's father lives in a separate apartment and visits the family on a regular basis.

As few girls get to attend school in Yemen, Pritina tells of how her older sisters fought for her to go to school. They were not fortunate enough to go to school themselves, but they advocated for her to be able to attend school. Sadly, Yemeni women have one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world. Up until the age of seven, her older sisters would teach her what they had learned at a community center for girls. At this community center for girls, her sisters took cooking classes and learned how to do Henna. There were also some English classes, and they would share all they had learned with Pritina. It was her eagerness to learn and her older sisters insistence, that eventually led to her father agreeing that she could go to school. She attended school from age seven through nine, until the invasion of her city brought that to an end. Pritina is classified as a SIFE (student with interrupted formal education), as she only first

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attended school at the age of seven and could not attend school for about a year, before she immigrated to the States.

### **Linguistic Challenges**

Pritina can communicate really well. In fact, she is proud of the fact that she “speaks the best English in her family” and often has to translate for them. However, she is aware that she lags behind in her academic writing. Even though her verbal communication is not a problem, her spelling and writing reveal otherwise. Research from the AACTE (2019) suggests that getting on par with L1 peers usually takes 5-7 years. When asked to read aloud, she does so with relative ease. However, if she reads for comprehension, she has to slow down and may read a sentence a few times in order to grasp its meaning. Her writing skills are still developing and this seems to be the area that needs the most attention. Writing down her thoughts is what she seems to battle with the most. Even though she articulates her thoughts orally, she finds it challenging to put it into words on paper. Her spelling also needs a lot of work and she often still battles to write down high-frequency correctly. She says that she always feels “stupid” because she cannot keep up with her L1 peers at school, and that any writing exercise takes her so much longer to complete.

### **Socio-cultural Context Impacts**

Pritina is Muslim and wears a hijab every day. She also wears long skirts or dresses. Her arms are also covered at all times. One cannot help noticing this difference in dress, when most other students are in shorts and tank tops. She says that she is tired of being asked if she is hot.

Pritina is well-liked by her peers. She is friendly and confident. Because she is such an eager participant in class, other students often ask her for help. She willingly helps her classmates if she is able to. The other two Arabic students in the class often ask her for a word in

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English and I can tell that this boosts her confidence. If she does not know a word in English, she is not afraid to ask or use translating software on her phone, to find the word.

Pritina is a delightful student. She is attentive and engaged. Her body language indicates that he is eager to learn. She sits upright at her desks, her body is still and she often leans forward in anticipations. One can see that she listens closely, as she is ready to answer questions, or be a volunteer. She is courteous and when she does not understand a word or an instruction, she will politely raise her hand and ask. She is very motivated to learn and takes pride in her work. She wants to do things correctly, whether it is speaking, reading or writing. When corrected while talking or reading, she repeats the word. She sometimes self-corrects or checks that she is pronouncing words correctly.

### **Complexity of Assessment and Evaluation**

When looking up her school records, there are only three lines listed. There is no record of aNYSISTEL score, although this is the first line of her school record. For her first NYSESLAT test in 2017, she scored a 200/99. The following year, her second NYSESLAT score increased to 252/99. She moved from emerging to transitioning, which reflects her great progress.

During this summer session, IRLA was used to place her on a reading level. A running record was also done to analyze any specific reading errors. Testing is scheduled to take place during the last week of summer. Usually, this IRLA testing takes place every 10 weeks during the school year.

Ongoing (informal) assessment has taken place throughout this summer session. We used tasks completed in class, to give feedback. Their final project, where students write a book

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on the biome that they have studied, will be a good representation of her work. She will be getting feedback on her project.

### **Impact on the Student**

Pritina's verbal communication is good, but more time is needed for the development of her academic writing. As she has no problem interacting with other students or her teachers, she does well socially and seems to have many friends. Her language development is sound and she shows great progress.

She shows such eagerness to learn and is confident to ask questions when she does not know a word or how to write something. Her affective filter is low. However, she does express concern that she is worried about starting high school. None of her older siblings completed high school. She knows that the Regents exams are tough and she does not want to disappoint her family or herself.

### **Research Strategies**

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) account for social interaction with others. This takes up to two years to develop. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) takes place when writing skills such as comparing, evaluating and synthesizing uses correct academic language. This takes five to seven years to develop.

### **Conclusion**

Developing relationships is key to learning. I love that saying, "Reach them before you teach them". Students are more likely to work really hard for a teacher who they know cares about them and their progress.

Moving forward, Pritina will continue to get extra ENL services at school. If she were my student, I would give Pritina a journal that she has to write in each day, for twenty minutes at

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home. Writing improves when students write. By going over her writing with her, spelling, vocabulary and grammar will improve. This will help to narrow down the writing gap when it comes to her academic writing.