



Bringing the
learning *home*

Adaptation & coping



A *resource* for study abroad
Australian Learning & Teaching Council

Produced by Tonia Gray,
Greg Downey & Jan Gothard

2012
Resources



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Adaptation & coping

Instructions

The resources in this document are intended to accompany the Instructor's Guide provided for the module, Adaptation and Coping. These materials should be easier to photocopy for students to support the re-entry workshop outlined in that guide.

The documents should be distributed prior to the meeting for the workshop.



Resources

'To Risk'

by William Arthur **Ward**

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool,
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.
To reach out to another is to risk involvement,
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.
To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss.
To love is to risk not being loved in return,
To live is to risk dying,
To hope is to risk despair,
To try is to risk failure.
But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.
He may avoid suffering and sorrow,
But he cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live.
Chained by his servitude he is a slave who has forfeited all freedom.
Only a person who risks is free.
The pessimist complains about the wind;
The optimist expects it to change;
And the realist adjusts the sails.



Preparing to depart

Home is a place where we have habitual ways of operating and of being engaged with our world. Home offers safety, security, and predictability. So moving on from our fishbowl

leaves us, metaphorically, as a fish out of water, or at least out of familiar water.

Leaving *home* and departing from your safe *fishbowl* (which constitutes your habitual ways of operating and being in the world) and becoming a fish in unfamiliar waters is part of the journey. How you manage to thrive and to develop intercultural skills is part of your learning trajectory.

There is a peculiar pleasure
in riding out into the unknown.
A pleasure which no second
journey on the same trail
ever affords."

— Edith Durham

'Stepping into the unknown' involves, first of all, moving beyond our comfort zone, accepting the challenges, and moving on

into our zone of courage. Being a stranger imposes many challenges and tribulations on the student traveller. From time to time, students will experience discomfort, ambiguity and dissonance. This is especially true for the first time sojourner (McKeown, 2009). However, risk-taking and stepping beyond what we do habitually, as shown in Figure 2 below, can lead to the mastery of a new set of skills and to the development of traits which are pivotal to personal growth and evolution. For example, we don't really know how good our language skills or our ability to negotiate with people are unless we actually have to use them. We may not be aware of our own cultural biases until we come up against unfamiliar sensations. We may recognise new strengths in ourselves, and develop a greater sense of mastery, if we are forced to confront new challenges.

The point is that you should recognise that discomfort is not necessarily a sign that you are



Figure 1: Edgework: Courage, Challenge and Comfort Zones

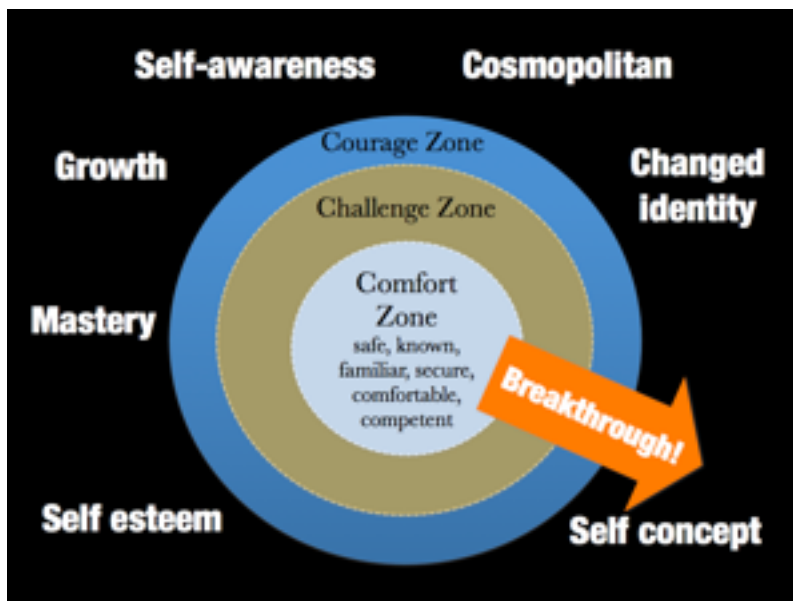


Figure 2: Breakthrough on the edge.

doing something wrong; some ambiguity and disorientation may even be a positive indication that you're challenging yourself and taking advantage of new opportunities. Outside your familiar environment, simple tasks can become suddenly difficult; no longer being able to travel the way that you are familiar, get food, or accomplish daily chores, for example, will mean that your problem-solving skills, your flexibility, and your resourcefulness may come into

play. The result can be a real sense of accomplishment, even though you may be doing a task that is familiar or simple at home.

Motivations for studying abroad:

Every student will have a different story about why he or she has decided to undertake study abroad or exchange. For the most part however, two generic reasons generally motivate studying abroad: 1) **Inspiration** or 2) **Desperation**.

Inspiration may come from a variety of sources. Perhaps the catalyst was an acquaintance who had done study abroad before and brought back amazing stories or striking photos, or perhaps someone you know who has travelled more generally. You may have read intriguing stories about the people from the region you decide to visit or studied their language. You may have romantic notions of cobblestone alleyways, endless white sand beaches, deserts and mountainscapes; a desire to see snow and experience 'real cold,' as one student put it: the possibilities are endless. You might find it useful to reflect on why you have arrived at this point, and what inspired your decision.

On the other hand, travel can sometimes be an attempt to escape from home and what is familiar, with **desperation** rather than inspiration the impulse behind study abroad. Escaping dysfunctional families or relationship upheavals, trying to get away from a stagnant or unchallenging lifestyle, trying to find a way to distinguish themselves from other university students, looking for a place to re-invent oneself – these may all be relevant to the decision. For many students, a combination of inspiration and a desire for change – if not a full-blown hope of reinventing oneself – will be the most important factors leading to study abroad.

Activity: Preparing for separating & the study abroad experience

Before a student departs for an international sojourn, there are a multitude of things with which to deal. In concrete terms, visas, class enrolments, accommodation, travel, and insurance all have to be negotiated. The challenge might be further compounded by the need to earn money before departure. At the same time, you may be juggling with **the prospective emotional intensity** of leaving friends, family and home.

Resources below include comments from students preparing for departure. The same themes recur: enormous excitement alongside some (albeit limited) anxiety about their capacity to cope; anticipation that this is going to be THE most wonderful time they have ever experienced and yet feeling that they have so much to do before departure. For some, those emotions are coupled with trepidation about how things will be when they ultimately return home. One student, for instance, reassured herself:

I remind myself that it is going to be amazing, I am going to meet sooo many new people, everything is going to be exactly the same when I get back... (Lisa R)

But maybe not!

- What are the things that are weighing on your mind right now?
- Are you prepared for change, not just in yourself, but in others, when you return? Or do you agree with Lisa, that everything is going to be exactly the same when you get back?



In preparation to depart, Danielle also makes an apt point that might be weighing on some students' minds:

How does one fit their life into a few bags?

As you will become increasingly aware: when you depart, you will be leaving a lot behind.

The posts below, which all come from the BTLH blog www.ozstudentsabroad.com might be a good resource for preparing to go abroad. The weblog is accessible thematically and is an excellent repository of information, ideas, advice and feelings, which students might well want to exploit as part of the process of pre-departure exploration.

‘10 days and counting every minute!’ – Kyran B.

I am starting to FREAK out!

It's 10 days until my journey to Wisconsin-Whitewater, and I am absolutely freaking out. This is going to be amazing. My whole family is getting sick to death of me talking about it, so I'll just vent here. One of my friends left for San Francisco last night and I was always leaving 10 days after her so now that she's gone, it's my countdown!

The only thing that sucks is that in order to get the cheapest flight available, I'm taking four different planes and three different airlines – not really crash hot about that considering that I've never traveled alone, let alone anywhere overseas other than Bali for crying out loud. So I leave Perth on the 6th of January at 2.55pm and arrive at 8.20pm on the 7th of January American time – so that's about 9.20am home time – 2 days travel – so if anyone has any suggestions on stuff to do on the plane/ while waiting in the airport I'd greatly welcome them!

All I have left to do now is invest in some warm clothes, photocopy my info for my family, work out my itinerary down to a tee and I'm off.

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2010/12/27/10days-and-counting-every-minute/>



‘Farewell Australia’ – Lisa R.

Well after one year of planning I am finally leaving! I had my farewell on Wednesday at my favourite place and my favourite food – north gong \$7.50 schnitz. :) I am going to the University of Victoria, Canada, for a whole year.

I am so excited! I just finished my last day of work. Tomorrow is going to be Christmas, then I leave on Sunday. First stop Hawaii then Alaska then Seattle where I will catch a ferry to Victoria.

There are so many little things to do, that my mum always reminds me (thank goodness!). My mum is worried that something will go wrong so I have photocopied every single document I can think of that she might need. She is worried I will meet a nice Canadian boy and won't come home

Rarely do I start to feel a bit overwhelmed, but then I remind myself that it is going to be amazing, I am going to meet sooo many new people, everything is going to be exactly the same when I get back. I have skype to keep in contact with people back home, and I don't think anyone has ever gone on exchange and thought, "man, I really wish I hadn't gone on exchange, it sucked!" That's about it for now, see ya in Hawaii.

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2010/12/17/farewell-australia/>

Only a matter of days away – Danielle P.



Hi everyone!

I'm only 4 days away from the most incredible experience of my life so far! I'm leaving for San Francisco for a bit of travel before heading to Washington D.C. for my year of study at the American University! I am constantly nervous/ excited/terrified, and I don't really think it's actually kicked in that I'm leaving everyone behind so soon!

After the continuous paperwork and fees, I'm finally getting to the end and started packing yesterday! How does one fit their life into a few bags?

Can't wait to start this experience and read what everyone else is doing!

Good luck, everyone!

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2010/12/23/only-a-matter-of-days-away/>

'Next step done...' – Emma R.

Well today was eventful. 7am wake up to apply for my residency permit. We were gone for four hours, 15 minutes were spent in the German Consulate.

I hate to sound like a cliché, but the lady behind the desk was very efficient. And nice. I watched her conversation with some German nationals. All I could understand is that she could not do something, then asked when the passport ran out, to which the national replied the first of March. I felt like such a loser.

I gave another lady an empathetic smile when she struggled with the door to get in, she said something in German and laughed so I did one of those "o yeah" laughy-things. I still have no idea what she said.

I guess this is my first experience of language barriers where I'm the odd one out. On the plus side my application was all good and I can expect the permit in 4 weeks. I leave in 6.

Not long now. So exciting.

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/01/07/next-step-done/>

"Not until we are
lost do we begin
to understand
ourselves."

— Henry David Thoreau

Stories of coping & adapting

‘Two weeks of German’ – by Betty

10 days later it was time to leave the mountains. My bag was full of delicious jam, pickles and bread that I had helped make. I left on Sunday night, with a lift through carpooling.co.uk. A man called Viktor was driving from Villach to Bratislava, and I managed to get a lift to Vienna for only 10 Euros! (the train was 50 Euros). I was feeling pretty tired, as I had had a late night and a few drinks the night before. I was looking forward to listening to my music, staring out the window and perhaps having a little nap. Not if Viktor had anything to do about it. Viktor was a very inquisitive man, he could speak 7 languages and was thirsty for knowledge. He made it his mission to get out all the information I had on Australia. This involved 1000's of questions ranging from what were some famous Australian icons/celebrities/brands/foods; the metric system; the Australian dollar; house prices; Australians' average annual income; the distance between capital cities; the population and demographics; the weather... and the list continues. I had to make up a few things, but I'm sure he checked everything I said when he got home anyway. He had little interest for the 3 other Austrian passengers sitting squashed up in the back of the car. I guess there was probably nothing about Austria that he didn't already know....



A small kite festival I stumbled upon on a Sunday walk.

I got back to my miniature flat in the student residence where I was staying. The hospital-like interior and grey atmosphere didn't bother me at all... However the contrast between the mountains and city was felt straight away, and I immediately missed the fresh air and happy little routine that I had had. The next day I started my two week intensive German class. I found out why it was called intensive. Four hours of German a day, for ten days. Intense.

A lot of the other students in the class were European, and had experience at learning other languages, at least by learning English and in some cases other languages too. It makes me angry that Australian schooling is so lax at teaching foreign languages. There is a certain arrogance at thinking that because English is a dominant language that no others are useful. I understand that because Australia is so far away from everywhere it is difficult for students to practise the languages that they are learning, but I still think that it is a



Me at the fruit and veggie market outside the metro station near my house. Much cheaper and fresher and friendlier than the supermarket.

skill that every brain should have to concur. And they say that it's much easier for children to pick up new languages. I struggled initially in the German class, and felt that I was behind the students in picking up the language. I don't know if it was because I didn't have any experience at learning a language, or that I had other things on my mind at the time, or simply if languages were not my strong point. However, it did get a little easier. The class became a lot more enjoyable as everyone got to know each other. We even went out for drinks a few times, and would chat in the breaks about our

troubles and successes in our new homes.

We learnt a lot in the two weeks. Everyday I could understand more and more German words written on advertisements; in the metro; on street signs; or spoken in the street. It was really useful learning the numbers, as I began to know how much my shopping cost at the vegetable market; which meant that I didn't have to guess or always hand over way too money just to be on the safe side.

During my first two weeks in Vienna I wasn't so happy. After my busy and fun time in the mountains the realisation that I was all alone in a big foreign city hit me. I have traveled a lot in the past, but always with friends. This makes the difficulties that you come across not such big dilemmas, as they are shared with others and solved together. Now I was the one solely in charge of the map (not my strong point) and getting lost was a

frequent occurrence. I was really missing my friends, family and lover back home, and was wondering why I had chosen to come and live on the other side of the world from them. Small things, like washing my clothes or getting my film developed, became difficult tasks. I knew it would get easier as it all became more familiar, but I still felt lost and frustrated a lot of the time.



Photo from Austria by Emily.

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/10/14/two-weeks-of-german/>

‘Life Abroad’ – Kyran B.

As you can probably imagine from the picture [to the right], it's freezing here. It's about minus 8 at the moment and somehow, that's considered an 'okay day' here in Whitewater. I must admit though, I am getting used to the cold. I can bear it in one pair of leggings now, instead of three.

I know my home uni told me I'd get homesick and want to leave, but I didn't expect it to be such a strong feeling as I had when I first got here. When I was in my hotels it was alright, it was like a holiday, but as soon as I moved into my dorms, was all alone and knew nobody - the feeling sank in and I wanted to leave that day, that second. Then we had orientation, and I made some friends. Now that I have friends and people to hang out with, it's not such a bad place to be. I haven't had many classes yet, but I'm sure once they start up, it'll be even better. I'm waiting for the new feeling to end so that I can finally say 'I live here'.



I've had a lot of people ask me why the hell I came to Wisconsin from Australia, especially to the small town of Whitewater, but I think I made the right decision because it feels more like a community here. Everyone is nice to everyone, it's a short walk to whatever you need, and there seems to be no kind of segregation of people that I would sometimes see in Australia. I'm starting to really like living here. :)

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/01/19/life-abroad/>

‘Land of the Free, Home of the Brave - but it's not my home.’ – by Olivia

Hello,

Been a while since the last blog, I think I was ranting about my Brazilian VISA experience, which worked out thank goodness. I did go to Brazil for winter break and had a wonderful time with my best friend and her family, that is definitely something I will not forget any time soon. Back at UMass Amherst now and I have four-ish months left of my experience here, and I'm starting to miss home, everything about home, my friends and family and the feeling that I really belong. As soon as I got back to UMass and class started again, it was evident that this semester was going to be different from the last. I had close friends leave to continue their adventures, and other friends let me down when I needed them. I had tried so hard to make this the best

experience I could that I wanted America to be my home. But it's not my home, it's not the place where people love and care for me and help me through tough times. Australia is, and I had forgotten that. Thankfully, my sister is arriving for a visit later this week, and I'm going to have two crazy busy weekends ahead of me, one in Boston and one in New York City. Then later in March, my parents are arriving to visit me and have a little American experience of their own.

I don't want to seem like I regret going on exchange; I don't at all, but I do have to admit I was a little bit too cocky about how I would cope over here. Bad shit happens everywhere, no matter who you are or where you are, and exchange isn't going to be all fun times and happiness, especially not for 9 months straight. So my best advice for pending and current exchange students is don't forget where you are from, don't get caught up in a swirl of new things and forget about home because eventually you have to go back home and it should feel good.

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/02/01/land-of-the-free-home-of-the-brave-but-its-not-my-home/>

‘Missing home’ – by Emily

My Danish friend took me to the beach in Aarhus, because I said I missed seeing the ocean. This was a homesickness-cure like nothing else!

Standing at the end of the pier looking out across the ocean captures the sense of longing associated with home sickness — the flip side of study abroad.



‘Pa pa, Polska!’ – by Lucy C.

It's the night before I leave Krakow and finish up my exchange experience. Obviously it's time for a quick reflection.

I didn't enjoy the university aspect of exchange much, I'll be honest. I got through two subjects without reading a single academic article or piece of writing - I managed to write entire presentations and exams using Wikipedia and lecture notes alone. And to me, that is a complete joke and should never happen. Other classes I didn't even bother turning up to because they were boring, because no one did the readings, because no one took attendance and it wasn't mandatory and I didn't feel obliged to sit through two hours of an old, fat jolly man enjoying the sound of his own voice while really teaching nothing we couldn't really in a Norman Davies book.

And because I didn't get the classes I'd organised to enrol in before I left Australia, my timetable ended up being five days a week, with the one class that attendance was taken for - Polish - being on Mondays and Fridays. No weekends away for me, really, I just skipped a couple of classes here and there but at the end of the day, I had to study and I had to pass. And again, it wasn't terribly fun and sometimes I feel like I almost wasted my time here because I've only been to 6 countries, including Poland.



But 6 countries is still a lot more than a lot of other 20-year-olds I know at home have seen. How many 20-year-old Aussies can say they've hiked up Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, have best friends in Hungary and Slovenia, touched the Berlin Wall, seen Manchester United play at Old Trafford, enjoyed the charm of Stockholm's Gamla Stan or - more to the point - managed to stumble through four months of living in a still somewhat developing post-communist country where they didn't know anyone, didn't speak the language and had never been to before?

Not a bad effort, in my books. I wouldn't come back to Poland to study again, and I don't know if I'd come here to work in anything other than an EU-sponsored or funded job because organisation and bureaucracy is terrible here. But I hope there's an infinite amount of visits to this incredible city in my future.

Hi Lucy

Thank you for your honest reflection on your exchange experience. So in the balance- it seems it was more than worth doing even if the academic experience was frankly unexciting, in your book. I wonder how this will influence your approach to your studies when you go back. I hope you get the chance to share with fellow Oz students back home your perception of the value of the Oz uni way of doing things (death to Wikipedians and plagiarism!) and maybe to reflect on the differences. There has to be SOME point to the Polish way of teaching – why do you think they approach things as they do? Did you have any particular expectations about study in Poland before you went or was study a kind of 'given' and the experience itself more the focus? Sorry, this is turning into an inquisition – I am just really interested in your reflections on your academic experience

You are right – your experiences have made you a very different 20 year old to the person you were before you left. Let us know how that feels once you're back home.

Jan

Lucy's response

I don't think I really got the 'Polish' way of teaching – because all my subjects were in English, my subjects were basically entirely created for foreign students and not really for Polish students. There were one or two Poles in a couple of my classes, but by and large it was all masters degree students from other countries or Erasmus students.

I guess perhaps the rationale was just to make it easy for everyone involved – lecturers don't have to spend too much time marking really dense and complex work from foreigners and can focus on their domestic students who are here for a whole degree, and students don't have to put much effort in and can focus on going out drinking or travelling or whatever else they want to do, so they won't really say a bad word about the university when they have a cruisy time.

I thought it would be at least a little bit similar to Australia – I thought all subjects would demand at least one piece of properly researched & cited work, because I thought that would be the case anywhere I went. I thought the idea of research and inquiry being integral to academia was a fairly universal thing. But again, maybe exchange students are treated a little bit differently.

Original post and comments at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/02/09/pa-pa-polska/>

*I can't think of anything
that excites a greater
sense of childlike
wonder than to be in a
country where you are
ignorant of almost
everything.*

- Bill Bryson



Exercise One

After reading all of the passages above, or a selection, try listing the ways in which you coped with obstacles, homesickness, opportunities or adversity.

What qualities did you exhibit to get through the “rough patches”?

What strategies or skills do you think you possess to overcome adversity?

How do you recognise your limits, the things that are beyond your skills?

What do you do if you are under too much stress?

Have you been in situations where you backed down from a challenge? Why?

What gave you an indication that pushing further was not a good idea?

worksheet

Identify the toughest obstacle you have faced in your life.

Reflect on why it was so difficult.

So what were the feelings associated with the event?

What aspects challenged you the most?

How did you respond?

What resources did you draw on to enable you to get through this event?

What personality qualities and skills did this experience highlight?

And how are these skills transferable to your tool-kit while travelling overseas?



Culture shock

‘Culture shock’ occurs when people confront a new way of life, especially in long-term travel, migration, or taking up residence in another culture. A change in your context can lead to disorientation, especially as taken-for-granted expectations and patterns of behaviour prove to be in conflict with the new environment. Oberg (1960: 177) argued that culture shock ‘is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse,’ or the ‘thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life.’ Adler expanded the definition:

Culture shock is primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences. It may encompass feelings of helplessness, irritability, and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured or disregarded. (1975: 13)

For example, you may not understand implicit patterns of non-verbal communication or norms for politeness in your host country when you first arrive, so basic types of interaction can seem unnecessarily difficult and prone to misunderstanding. Bombarded by what Nancy Adler (1981) calls ‘unpredictable cues,’ you can become tired, confused and frustrated, as everyday life seems difficult to understand or navigate. Particularly if you are living abroad for the first time, you may not be prepared for the profundity of cultural difference that you will experience, and the challenge of adapting can cause hostility, frustration, and self-doubt.

Culture shock can lead to intense feelings of isolation, homesickness, sadness, lethargy, insomnia, physical complaints, irritability, and even excessive behaviour, such as drinking or over-eating (Adler 1975; Church 1982; Oberg 1960). The more you are prepared for the sense of cultural disequilibrium, however, the less likely your ‘symptoms’ are to be severe, and the more quickly you will break out of cycles of response that deepen your discomfort (for example, you may worry excessively at first, making you feel even more stressed out by changes in the way you need to get things done).

Although some degree of culture shock is probably inevitable when moving from one place to another, you can get better at recognising it and gain some valuable skills to help move through transition stages more quickly. That is, even though culture shock may be uncomfortable, it is not a psychological disorder, or even necessarily a problem. Sensations of dislocation or disequilibrium are the way that you register the subtle differences of your new host culture, the emotional sign that you are picking up on changes in your context and the way people are treating you, even unconscious or implicit shifts in people’s expectations and patterns of behaviour.

At the same time, because we see cultural dislocation as a necessary and even vital part of intercultural learning while abroad, we encourage you to recognise when you have very mild forms of culture shock in settings that are similar to your homes – what we call ‘cultural stagger’. The term, ‘culture shock,’ may sound overly dramatic, or necessarily traumatic, when you might be experiencing more subtle forms of disorientation, and thus failing to recognise how much you’re learning, adapting, and improving your coping skills.

Pederson (1995: 3) describes culture shock as a transition through five stages: **Honeymoon**, **Disintegration**, **Reintegration**, **Autonomy**, and **Interdependence**. In the first, **Honeymoon** stage, your arrival in a new culture brings excitement and curiosity, you may be relieved and energised by the fact that you’ve finally reached your destination. But your identity and your expectations are still firmly grounded in your home culture. During the second stage, the unfamiliar cues and absence of familiar expectations of a new culture can trip you up or even overwhelm you, resulting in a sense of inadequacy or struggle coping that Pederson calls **Disintegration**.

In the third state, your **Reintegration** and increasing confidence can be accompanied by



anger, frustration and resentment of your host culture. Although you are growing in skill and adapting to the new place, you may find it especially annoying; this is normal.

As you move toward **Autonomy**, the fourth stage, your view of your host culture is liable to become more balanced,

The symptoms of culture shock (adapted from Oberg 1960)

- Strain due to effort of adjusting
- Sense of loss and feelings of deprivation or isolation
- Insomnia or lethargy
- Unusual physical complaints with no clear cause.
- Great concerns about health and minor symptoms.
- Over-eating, excessive drinking or other compensatory behaviour
- Feeling rejected by & rejecting the host culture.
- Confusion about your role
- Irritability – especially over delays or "inefficiencies."
- Surprise, anxiety, even disgust & indignation at cultural differences
- Feelings of impotence & inability to cope (in severe cases).
- Concern for cleanliness & feeling things are dirty.
- Fear of physical contact with new people.
- Feeling of helplessness & sometimes extreme dependence.
- Excessive distrust or fear of people.
- Dependence on company of fellow ex-patriots.

recognising both strengths and weaknesses, and you may even gain a new perspective on your home culture. Ideally, according to Pederson, you may eventually reach equal cultural 'fluency' or **Interdependence** with enough time and adjustment. Whether or not becoming fully 'bi-cultural' is possible is controversial; certainly you can move toward what Milton Bennett (1986) calls 'ethnorelativism,' recognising that different sets of values, beliefs and behaviours are viable and appropriate to their own context.

The point is that some disorientation, frustration, even anger, are normal, but they are seldom the end point of our adaptation processes, unless we leave another culture prematurely. If you temporarily lose site of what you might love about a place, don't worry: the more you grow accustomed to the new location, new values, and new habits, the more natural they will feel. Students who travel in the other direction, coming to Australia on exchange, have the same sorts of reaction to your home culture, so don't be too surprised, or worried that you are doing something wrong.

'Cultural stagger'

Because Australian students often go on exchange to countries with quite similar cultures or the same language, you often avoid the more severe forms of culture shock. Instead, we have found that students tend to have a kind of 'cultural stagger': instead of a profound shock, you find yourself fluctuating between feeling quite comfortable and, sometimes without much warning, realising that you have misunderstood what is happening or do not know what to do in your new context. The cultural differences can be quite subtle, and differences in expectations are more like a nagging, recurring bother or interpersonal stumbles than a sense of feeling alien or out of place.

Don't worry if you don't get fully blown 'culture shock'; sometimes the symptoms are the most severe cases, and you might have much milder responses to the need to adapt (especially when studying in Canada, the UK or the US). If you are travelling a 'short' cultural distance, and adaptation to your host country seems to go really quickly, you should be especially vigilant for moments in which you stumble interculturally or experience discomfort, however slight. If a joke goes off the rails, or someone does not understand a common metaphor, or an institution (like your host university) doesn't work as you expect, or a member of the host culture assumes some knowledge that you do not have, record these events, reflect on them, and explore them. These little cultural gaps are crucial, as they're the clues that remind you that you're not at home. It's too easy and inaccurate to just assume everyone is the same, and noticing the stumbles can make you more sensitive to intercultural variation, and more curious about your host cultures.

Step 2

From Adaptation to Coping

Generally, as time goes by, we adapt to and cope with our new environment. This transition is graphically represented by the 'W' curve. Although the diagram has been criticised at times for over-simplification, the image can help you to recognise your own emotional trajectory when studying abroad, realising that some of your most troubling sensations are, in fact, typical.

Often, an initial period of euphoria or excitement when travelling (the 'Honeymoon stage') can be followed by growing frustration, irritation, or even hostility toward differences in the host culture, indicated by the first dip in the 'W'. As the diagram shows, overall satisfaction can drop quite low until students begin to adapt, develop a sense of

humour about cultural differences, grow accustomed to your new setting, or come to appreciate the differences that were initial sources of frustration. In a very short trip, you may leave before you feel that you have adapted or, in particular trying circumstances, the adaptation may take so long that your overall satisfaction level does not approach your sense of comfort at home (the 'In-sync' point, or Autonomy, is still lower than your highly adjusted satisfaction level at home).

The 'W' curve also shows that a similar cycle of excitement, disappointment or dissatisfaction, and recovery can also occur when you return home, as we discuss below. The second 'dip' in the 'W' curve, 'reverse culture shock,' can be more disconcerting than the first, especially if you have not been warned about reverse culture shock. Also, because sojourning abroad is, by definition, a temporary state but the return is likely more permanent, you can have a harder time with the discomfort, as you may feel that something has gone

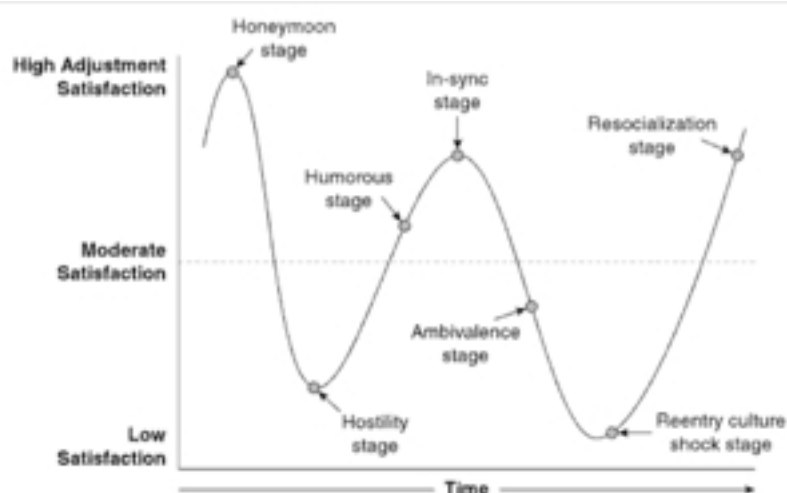


Figure 1.12 U-Curve Model of Intercultural Adjustment

SOURCE: Adapted visualization from Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962).

wrong, that you are simply unhappy, or that your condition is not understood by those around you. We offer a number of suggestions for helping cope with re-entry shock below.

‘Apology and culture shock’ – Rebekah W.

First of all, sorry I have not written in so long. I do not have the internet in Montreal, and I lost my username and password.

I think I'm starting to feel a bit of the culture shock, I'm a little disappointed/disheartened with school, particularly women's studies, actually mostly just women's studies. I'm also starting to find Anglophone Canadians slightly passive aggressive which is slightly off-putting. I've made a lot of friends but I do not feel completely at home with any of them, I feel like my Queer friends for example judge my more hetero international friends etc. But anyway I'm descending into stereotypes which is not productive, or nice or polite or anything.

But even the politeness here is bugging me. I want to fucking swear and be loud and myself, and it just does not seem appropriate. In front of Quebecois it's 'so anglo' i.e. so trashy, loud n obnoxious, and in front of anglo Canadian's it's just rude, offensive or bizarre.

That and school has been hectic. So difficult to adapt to, but I got a bunch of grades back, and I got all A's and B's which I'm happy with, extremely happy with in fact, but I think I would prefer lower grades and less stress/workload to be honest. They seem to overload you so much here e.g. for women's studies I have 3 or 4 readings per week to do and approx a 500-word write up for both of my 2 women's studies classes! It's bullshit. Plus assignments, one of them an activist project, is just ridiculous, not only depending on what I do for it do I have to risk deportation but there is absolutely no communication or support with it. They will also give you weighted assignments that weren't outlined in the syllabus or didn't have a date set like a week before they are due. I don't know how Canadian students work and take a full-time load, though I haven't met one that does yet, maybe they just don't.



Anyway obviously not feeling great today so I'm uploading this photo I took a couple of weeks ago:

I've also found there's a bit of an assumption about exchange students; that they're rich, trashy only here to have sex, get drunk and that they don't take their studies seriously. I am not rich! I lived below the poverty line for the first 19 years of my life, I worked 40 hours a week, plus fulltime study load, took out a loan and got a scholarship to get here. I'm not a 'stereotypically privileged student.' I'm just lucky and hard working. And you're right, no body really wants to listen. I feel like my Nan for example is in complete denial of any troubles I

might be having, she keeps changing the subject or even responding to my complaints with, "Sounds like you're having a really great time." The conversation seems so detached and bizarre.

As tired n grumpy n frustrated etc. as I am though, nothing has been that hard or that overwhelming. I did have a cry twice that I remember, but because of pretty hectic stuff that would probably make me cry at home as well. When I left I was really sick, like so so so sick. I contracted a virus, which gave me bronchitis n laryngitis, and traveling whilst not being able to stand without puking is one of the more hellish things I've done in the past few months.

I also had a lot of trouble with my cell phone carrier when I got here, and they charged me a butt-load and my phone didn't even work, was still sick, couldn't contact my family, trying to find a place to live (WITHOUT A PHONE!?!), my hostel booking was about to run out in a few days, and I couldn't extend it so I was thinking I might end up sleeping in the metro with the bums :S

Definitely distressing. But the universe conspired to help me, I got so ridiculously lucky, met some really cool people and found a place to live 2 days before my hostel booking ran out, cheap as chips, right near school, and one that I could move into straight away (I couldn't with any of the others I looked at). I received so many random acts of kindness around that time, which was really inspiring n cool. Anyway positive note to end on.

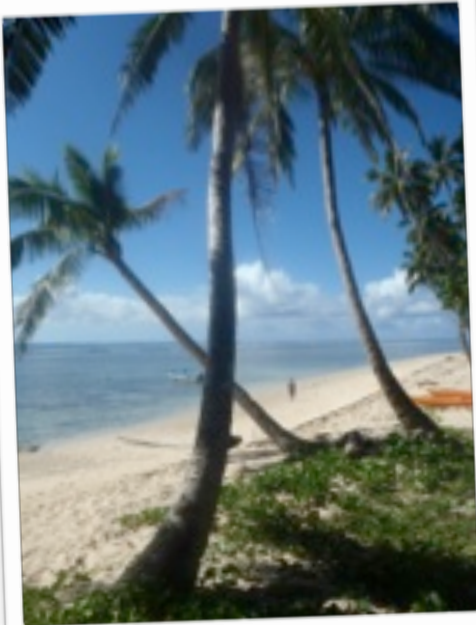


Think I will show you some cool photo's I took in the bush at Mont Tremblant, cos we all need some beauty and serenity sometimes:

Original post at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2010/10/28/apology-and-culture-shock/>

‘Bula from Fiji’ – Katie B.

As I look through this blog I see so much snow, cosy jackets and other signs of freezing weather. While most other exchange students have to deal with acclimatising to the cold of the northern hemisphere, I’m slowly getting accustomed to the sweaty temperature of the tropics. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to actually believe that I’m studying in Fiji.



When boarding the plane to Fiji I was surrounded by honeymoon couples and families already wearing their sarongs and sunglasses, ready for the usual one to two week holiday to this beautiful country. When asked by other passengers how long I was staying, I still remember the shocked looks I got when I said I was staying in Fiji for five months. Before I left people just could not understand that there was more to Fiji than palm trees and cocktails. The most common response I got was “is there really a university in Fiji?” Yes, the University of the South Pacific and what an amazing university it is. Each and every day that I am here I am realising that this is one of the most fascinating places to study. The University of the South Pacific is extremely unique as it is a regional university. This means that there are not only students here from Fiji but students from the other 12 partner countries. These countries include Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau,

Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Samoa. It still gets confusing trying to figure out which countries all my friends come from (and I learnt very quickly to make sure not to mix up Samoans and Tongans).

It is so amazing to study development in a country described as 'developing', surrounded by students from all over the region. In the very first 'Geography and Development in the Pacific' class I had, the lecturer told us that for our research project we had to do our own research. He gave the example that we could go to the squatter settlement just 200 meters from the classroom. Literally I can almost see a squatter settlement (and also the ocean) from my classroom.

One day I was sitting with a close Samoan friend talking about marriage and weddings. She casually stated that she wanted to wait until her father had passed away before she got married. I was shocked at the casual way she said this and asked her why. I ended up finding out that she is the daughter of a head Samoan chief who is also the associate Minister of Health in the national parliament. Because of this her wedding would be like a national event. She explained to me just



some of the complex rituals that would have to take place. Sitting on the floor of the dorm at midnight just chatting to these Samoan girls was probably the most interesting anthropology lesson I have ever had.



One of the best things about this university is the field trips. The most memorable one so far has been a three day village trip for my "Agriculture and nutrition in the developing world" class. The first day of the trip we spent stopping along the way to visit different commercial and subsistence farms. It was so fascinating as I have never learnt much about agriculture and what a better way to learn than standing in a hot (never been so hot in my entire life) cassava field with a farmer, in the interior of Fiji. Arriving at Lutu village and meeting the family I was staying with was so wonderful. The next day I spent the morning with the elderly women of the village as they

taught us how they weave mats. It included collecting the pandanus leaves, scrapping of the hard edges, drying, boiling the leaves, drying them again, smoothing them, cutting and then finally beginning to weave. They also explained to us the importance of the mats and how much they mean to women in Fiji. That afternoon one of the men in the village took a friend and I to his dalo (taro) plot, where we helped him dig up some dalo for dinner. Later that night our students held a cultural performance night. It was amazing to see dances from Tonga, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Fiji and French Canada, and they were all people in my class... Amazing! Throughout the time we were there they were always trying to explain to us about their livelihood and culture. They were so proud and content about their lives. I learnt once again that communities like these are the ones with so much wisdom. They live life the way it was meant to be lived. They in many ways are developed, we are the underdeveloped.

I realise that there are three things that are important to Fijians; Kava, Rugby and Church. What surprised me at the beginning was that Islanders can be very shy especially around international students. Many presume (and sometimes they are right) that the international students are more than happy to stay together and they are shocked when you actually show interest that you want to do more than just be acquaintances. Some of the highlights of the exchange experience is the moment where you transfer from being that Australian exchange student to being part of the group. And every time that it has happened, it has been while doing one of the three things mentioned above. Yesterday I was playing a game of touch rugby with some friends and like usually failing pretty badly. Then it was announced that due to the fact that we had been playing for so long, the sun had almost disappeared and that no one was bothering to score that whatever team scored next would be the winners. The game went on and I was trying so hard not to completely stuff it up for my team, as the guys especially were getting extremely competitive. As I was concentrating on the guy who I was meant to be defending I surprised everyone (including myself) by intercepting the ball and charging towards the try line (or the invisible line between a pair of thongs and a fallen coconut :)). Unfortunately my little legs couldn't run fast enough and I was touched before I scored. But as I turned around every player was on the ground in hysterical laughter because I took everyone by surprise. As I left to go home every single one of them,

including all the guys shook my hand and high fived me saying goodbye Katie. Suddenly I was no longer the white girl, I was Katie.



Kava is also a massive, massive thing in Fiji. Approximately 10 kava ceremonies down and I still cannot understand what is the huge appeal of drinking dirty looking water that taste revolting and makes your mouth go numb. But I'm slowly learning to block out the horrible taste and enjoy the amazing discussions and moments that occur around a Kava bowl.

Sometimes I feel like exchange is a bit like a balancing act. I'm still trying to figure out how to balance study and all the other things an exchange experience has to offer. Some weekends I choose to stay back in Suva to finish an essay and not go travelling with the

other international students. I feel sometimes that I will end up regretting studying when I could be snorkelling on an island. But other times I realise how much I am learning and that studying human rights in the common room with a girl from Tonga and another from Vanuatu is experiencing the true life of a university student in Fiji. Other times it also is a balancing act between working hard to build friendships with Fijian and regional students or hanging out with the other international students. Sometimes I feel guilty that I am spending too much time with the other international students and therefore I am missing out on other cultural experiences. Then I realise that spending time with the other international students, who are mostly from the USA can be at times more of a cultural experience than hanging out with friends who live in Suva. I've learnt so much about Americans while I am here. Some of them I love and others are so different from me in their attitudes and goals for their time in Fiji. I've actually begun a list of crazy things other international students have said. At the top of my list and my current favourites are "is Wales in New Zealand?" and "Katie, why don't you have an Australian accent?" (still don't understanding what accent they think I have)

One of the biggest things I have had to adjust to is what is commonly referred to as "Fiji Time". As a person who is usually pretty punctual, it has taken a while to actually force myself not to be on time to things. But still I seem to rush to the place I need to be, overtaking about 100 people to get there on time, realise that I'm in Fiji and no other Fijians are yet to arrive. Then I wait around for half an hour or more. But then occasionally something will start on time and all the Fijians are there on time. I still haven't figured out when a set time is a vague suggestion and when it actually is going to start on time. Luckily it never really bothers me too much and is really teaching me the true meaning of patience.

Another 3 important things to islanders are family, laughter and generosity. One of my favourite things to do is go to the cinema in Suva to watch a movie. I don't go just to take advantage of the \$3.50 prices but to hear the Fijians hysterically laugh. Even in the most serious movies they still find moments to laugh at. I also have had to stop complementing my friends on their appearances or one of their belongings. I've already got a collection

of bracelets, necklaces, a fan and even offered a shirt all because the moment you say you like it they take it off and hand it to you and no matter how many times you offer it back they won't except it.

I like a recent comment made by another exchange student- "Fiji softens the heart and hardens your feet!". I'm only half way through my exchange but already know that Fiji and the lessons I have learnt here will always be a part of me.

Original available at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/04/19/bula-from-fiji/>

‘Small differences that make a big difference’ – Sophie W.

It's been 2 months since arriving in Calgary and besides the obvious differences between Canada and Australia (like driving on the right), there are actually a lot of small differences between the two countries.

1. tax is not included in the sale price in a store. they add the tax when you pay at the register, and it changes in every province
2. seagulls are BIG. imagine a crow, but bigger. They're not actually in Calgary though; they're in Vancouver
3. university is like school. they don't put the lectures online so it's pretty much compulsory, and they split up a 3 hour lecture into 3 1hr lectures. So I have to go to 3 classes for each subject, I have 4 subjects which also have labs and tutes. I feel like I'm back in high school!
4. the cheese is orange, and egg yolks are yellow
5. main meals are called 'entrees', and entrees are called 'appetizers'
6. a schooner is called a 'pint'
7. you can't walk outside with wet hair otherwise it will freeze
8. ice fishing is not like sea fishing at all. So much more effort is required! You've gotta hike through the snow onto the lake, make holes in the ice AND put up a tent all before you start fishing.



Nevertheless, having a blast! Still not climatished to the -35 degree weather. It gets you every time you leave the building.

Original available at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/03/05/small-differences-that-make-a-big-difference/>

‘Kansai Gaidai, Osaka, Japan’ – by Riku

I have been in Japan for about three weeks now. It's not my first time here (in fact my 5th time), but it is my first time as a student. I'm originally from Finland, so I was already a 'foreigner' in Australia, but being a foreigner in Japan is different.



First of all, here I look like a foreigner, a 'gaijin'. As a European, I fit pretty well in Australia and the locals do not know that I'm from a far away country before I open my mouth. But here they spot me from far, because of the same reasons why I fit in Australia. I've heard from my fellow exchange students how the Japanese shop clerks run away to avoid the embarrassment of trying to communicate in English. Furthermore, some hairdressers around the campus refuse to take foreign clients. Paradoxically, there are situations where the locals come and talk to me only because I am, indeed, a gaijin.

I did not really have any kind of 'culture shock' when I first came to Australia. It was pretty similar with any Western country I had visited. Of course there are differences, such as the climate, but culturally Australia felt very familiar. It goes without saying that Japan is different. Japan is truly Asia (sorry Malaysia for stealing your slogan) with some Western influence.

Every day activities, such as shopping or asking directions, are so much easier for me in Australia, because I speak the language. However, I have only studied Japanese for less than half a year and most of it by using self-teaching guide books. I have self-studied hiraganas and katakanas, but I can't read many Chinese characters. I could write a long post about the complexity of Japanese writing system, but I will just state that it is a bit more difficult than the English alphabets, that are pretty much the same as we use in Finland. Thus, buying groceries and ordering in a restaurant becomes a bit of an effort.

Luckily, my host institution Kansai Gaidai has done great work organizing the exchange program. All the teachers and staff speak English, and all classes are concentrated in one building, the Center for International Education. We have Japanese every day, and we can interact with local Japanese students via 'speaking partner' program and in normal classes. Therefore, I can recommend this exchange program to everybody, even those without Japanese language skills. However, you can get more out of it if you speak the language.

Original available at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/02/16/kansai-gaidai-osaka-japan/>

Coping Strategies

Some of the best strategies for getting over culture shock involve changes in attitude and recognising that the response to culture shock can cause the problem to worsen. As you sojourn abroad, you will realise that how you respond to any experience can profoundly affect, not just the way people react to you, but also how quickly you successfully adapt. For example:

- If you become frustrated and aggressive, people will sense your hostility and either avoid you or respond with the same hostility. This can deepen your sense of isolation, loneliness, frustration with local people, and your distrust of your hosts.
- To your fellow nationals who are not aggressive, you will be a problem, embarrassing, or even a threat, so they are likely to pull away from you, which may exaggerate your feelings of dependence, loneliness, or feeling rejected.

The best defence, in this case, is to be cheerful and open, although you are certainly still permitted to have a degree of scepticism or caution about being in new situations. Remember that all of the challenge for intercultural communication is not solely on your own plates; people with whom you interact will have to figure out how to communicate with you as well. You will *cause* culture shock as well as experience it. Behaviours that you might take for granted may be very unusual, even bizarre, to your host community.



Some strategies to help adaptation and coping with the new location:

Curiosity

If you can see obstacles as problems to be investigated, understood, and solved, or signs of the new culture to explore, you will feel a much greater sense of control over difficult situations. For example, you are likely to be frustrated by your host university, for the simple reason that the systems in place will not be familiar. If you can see your host institution as a window onto your host culture, and consider how differences allow you to see the way that universities are often just a cultural subset of the host country, you may find the frustration diminishing.

At first, you may think that all the problems that you run into are signs of your hosts' problems or deep differences in values. In fact, many of the differences are more a problem of the inability to communicate. Judgment – trying to decide whether home or host country is better – is usually much less productive than understanding, especially for helping you to adapt. Don't worry about whether your host country is better or worse than home. Figure out how to get around locally, and there will be plenty of time for judging things later. Some students spend a lot of time criticising their hosts and whinging when they could be concentrating more on adapting.

Join in

You will find that becoming acculturated or well adapted is virtually impossible through a thick layer of defensiveness and refusal to join in. If you spend all your time in your dorm rooms or on Facebook, you can replace an international experience with an excruciating time of just missing what is gone. Even if you can't join in fully, the attempt to join in will usually demonstrate good will and the desire to be part of the group. If your fellow students from the host country go dancing, sing karaoke, play an unfamiliar sport, or some other activity, have a go, even if you're a complete 'failure.' Refusing to join in may be interpreted as disapproval or arrogance, and you'll quickly realise that lots of local people are probably in the same boat. As Oberg (1960: 182) points out, our participation is a kind of 'role play,' and that 'understanding the ways of people is essential but this does not mean that you have to give up your own.'

To join in, don't *just* get involved in pre-packaged experiences of your host culture. That is, try to do things with host-country students. Certainly, take advantage of good opportunities provided by your host institution's international office, if they have these sorts of activities, but also try to strike off the well-worn path for international guests and get into the same streets, clubs and places that locals frequent. For example, consider the following:

- Get involved in intramural sports, club sports, drama, or other activities where you get to train or rehearse with local students, and maybe even travel with teammates.
- Travel with classmates from your host country and accept invitations to join them. Commodified forms of experience can feel less emotionally entangling – you won't 'owe' anyone anything if you never accept hospitality – but they can be expensive and isolating in the long run.

Sense of humour

A strong sense of humour is vital, not only as a coping mechanism when you laugh at vagaries of life and difficulties overseas, but also to recognize that you are going to be very funny to local people. (At the same time, the student may also be fascinating, incredibly perceptive, exciting, and unusual in all kinds of ways...) As you slaughter the pronunciation of local place names, ask questions about things that are obvious to other people, and are shocked and surprised by what your hosts take for granted, you will give them great

opportunities to laugh, to be reminded of the distinctive things about their own homes, and generally appreciate interacting with you. Over time, you will increasingly figure out why everyone is laughing and join in, showing that you're learning a local way of functioning. Laughter cuts tension and is a great adaptation strategy; being too worried, prone to hurt feelings, or self conscious can slow your adaptation and make the experience more painful than it needs to be. Get ready to laugh at yourself.

Prepare for failure

Many of the students who travel abroad from Australia are the highest achieving students; you may be used to being on top of everything, knowing how things work, and being especially savvy. You need to prepare to fail, even in just small ways, as you learn the new rules of the road and ways of getting things done. Feeling incompetent, misunderstood, unpersuasive, relatively helpless, and generally clueless, at times, may be really disconcerting, especially if you're not used to it at home. Remind yourself that it's normal and that the same traits – determination, flexibility, thoughtfulness, enthusiasm, quick wits, perceptiveness – that allow you to succeed back home will likely do the same in the new setting, eventually. Ask questions. Observe the most successful people in your new setting. You'll catch on quickly, especially if you realise that nothing is wrong with you, nor with your host country, only the fit between the two. And the problem, if there is any, is likely temporary.

Have positive but realistic expectations

You will probably have an amazing experience, but it may not be the one you picture in your mind before you go. At the end, you will no doubt be glad that the trip broke your expectations, as you will have experiences you could not anticipate, learn things you did not realise you were going to learn, and find out new things about yourself. But don't be surprised if things don't go according to plan, especially if your plan is particularly detailed and ambitious.

Be kind and generous to others and yourself

Cut yourself some slack if you stumble at times in your new place. And try to be kind to others, as well. If your experience is particularly intense, such as sojourning in a challenging or stressful situation, don't push yourself until your nerves fray or be hard on yourself if you don't live up to your expectations. You may need to take a breather; for example, if you are studying and living in a foreign language, you may need to retreat to an English-language



Dutch cheese shop.

Me: "how do you keep out the mice?"

Dutch cheese shop owner: "We have a high standard of hygiene and cleanliness here."

Humour didn't translate.

movie every once in a while, or go off on a long, quiet bushwalk where you don't have to speak the new language. If you have set yourself an arduous schedule of travelling, sightseeing and cultural experiences, you may occasionally need a night to yourself. If you're doing a service learning project or working in the developing world, you may feel drained and need a retreat to a comfortable setting after a while. Don't be fearful of change and growth, but also don't expect yourself to remain at the edge of your courage zone for the entire trip.

Being generous also means not rushing to judgment or always assuming that everything has to be to your liking. Go with the flow, accept things that are offered to you graciously, and try the unfamiliar. The strange national dish of your host country may not be your favourite flavour, but the story of tasting it may be the one that you tell over and over again when you return home.

Examples of coping strategies

‘Alone in the Middle’ – by Sarah

Currently studying at Sophia University, Tokyo, from the outset I decided that I wanted to join a club. After learning about Japanese Club culture throughout my Japanese study I did not want to miss the opportunity of being able to actually participate in one. In Australia I am a rather sporty and outgoing person, playing tennis, dancing and working as a swim school teacher. After considerable deliberation I decided to join the 上智大学



水泳部 Sophia Swim Club. I have never

swum so many laps and spent so many hours in a pool but it has definitely been worth it, not only for the improved fitness but the amazing friends that I have made and the opportunity to practice my Japanese.

The first week of Spring Break I went with the Swim Club on 合宿 (*Gasshuku*) an intensive week-long training camp, in a remote location. During this time we swam 6 hours a day; over 5000 meters per session in addition to strength and cross training.

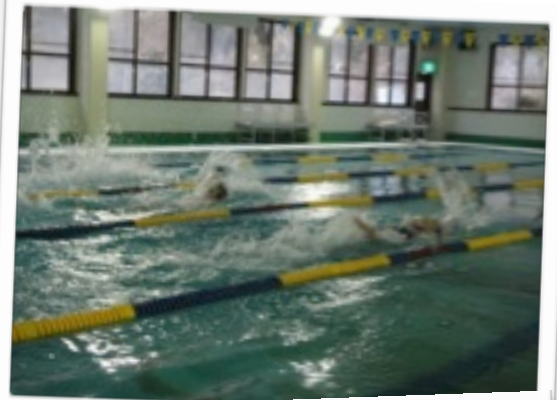
However, being away from what I have come to call 'home,' I became homesick for my life in Australia. This was compounded when I heard the other students talking about how their parents had helped to pack their luggage and made them lunch to bring for the travel, or what home cooked meal they were looking forward to eating when they got home – the little

things that you don't realise that you miss until they are not there. Also at times when I couldn't understand the Japanese they were speaking or when I thought I could not complete a swimming drill I felt defeated and wanted to give up (at one point there were even tears). I felt so alone even though I was in the middle of a group of people, which made me feel even more isolated.

Although if it were not for those group of people I would not be where I am today. They were there to help me through my emotional state and took the time to talk to me and make sure I was alright. The next morning I completed the seemingly impossible swim set, bettering my previous time by five seconds. Everyday each and every person would do their best to encourage all members of the group so that we could get through it together. Despite all being tired and in

pain we would push through to make

sure that we completed every set that was assigned, aiming to swim faster and harder. At the pseudo competition we competed in, each member stood at the side of the pool yelling chants into loud speakers with so much enthusiasm and energy despite having just swum their own race and having to prepare for the next. I learnt so much from this experience, not only that there really are no boundaries but the strength of people as a collective whole is a much stronger and more positive force than I ever knew.



Original available at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/02/24/alone-in-the-middle/>

Another student shared a similar experience from his sojourn abroad in Canada during one of our re-entry workshops. He had tried to play intramural hockey and found that even standing on the ice was a challenge. He had a picture of himself, apparently skating down the rink on attack, looking very much like he knew what he was doing, fully outfitted in the appropriate gear. At the workshop, he revealed that the picture was entirely deceptive; he laughed that his friends must have taken dozens of photos, and the one he shared was the only one in which he actually appeared to be skating rather than lying on the ice or hanging from the wall.

Nevertheless, like Sarah, this student reported that the effort to join in melted any social 'ice' that might have existed between him and the Canadian students. Though he had to endure both a few bruises, and some additional ribbing from the other hockey players and spectators, he found himself the centre of attention and enormous good will for having tried to join in. Moreover, as we discuss in the Professionalisation module, this funny travel story (and others like it) can yield up extremely strong 'career stories,' or examples that you can use to talk about lessons that you have learned in work-related skills like leadership, techniques for creating camaraderie or breaking down cross-cultural boundaries.

Long term adaptation

Over time, you may discover that the host country becomes so comfortable that you even start to worry about going home. As you move into the Autonomy or even Interdependence stage (see 'Culture shock' above), you may find that you are weighing up the benefits of living in your host country and are reluctant to give these up. Or, if you left Australia motivated by 'desperation' or the desire for change, you may fear coming home and struggling with the difficult situations that you escaped or risk losing the important ways you've changed.

Some of the students in our pilot project shared these sorts of feelings, growing anxious, sad or even feeling something that resembled mild panic as the end of their time abroad approached. Remind students that this sort of feeling should not surprise them too much; for many, international study was something that they dreamed about and worked toward for a long time. Some of our students chose their destination on the basis of long-term fascination or attraction to the place. Students may feel like their time is running out, that they have to squeeze in as much experience as possible.

Morgan studied abroad in Greece and described in a blog post her entire trajectory through both adaptation and greater understanding of her host culture.

'First Impressions about Thessaloniki' – by Morgan

I have been spending my semester abroad studying in the city of Thessaloniki in the north of Greece.

My first impressions upon arriving in Saloniki were of disappointment. The sky was grey and overcast, the weather barely 10 degrees and the buildings seemed dirty and unappealing. Nothing seemed to work as it should, or as it does back in Australia. Nothing can be achieved in one day, for instance if you want to post a letter home it will take a few days as you need to go and buy an envelope one day, and then try the post office a few times until it's open to send the letter. It can be frustrating and exhausting as you try to push past this to make life work the way you think it should. This view was soon overturned as I made friends, the weather improved and I began to really appreciate the beauty of the city.

The streets are lined with citrus trees which means that there is constantly a faint citrus scent wafting down the streets. You see past the graffiti and the ugliness of the buildings and instead begin to appreciate the undercurrent of the Greek culture which pulses through the city. The art of taking a coffee with friends and family for hours every single day. The sharing of dishes at meal times, which also last for several hours, the Greek version of siesta which means most of the shops close in the afternoon every day. You begin to adapt to the lack of urgency which surrounds everything, and it no longer bothers you that it can take days to fulfil a simple daily task, as that's part of the charm of Greece.

At first I was overwhelmed with the daily life of living in Saloniki, but now I know I'm going to find it really hard to adjust to being back home in Australia, where it is rude to be more than 10 minutes late to meet a friend, a coffee takes 30 minutes to drink at most. You also can't leave everything to do tomorrow like here. Whilst today you don't have anything specific to do, your too busy having a coffee and enjoying life to do it today so you will do it tomorrow instead.



Original available at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2011/04/29/first-impressions-about-thessaloniki/>



Step 3

Reverse culture shock

Students may not be ready for the second dip in the 'W' curve, the discomfort that can come when you return home and have to re-acculturate to a familiar place that might suddenly seem uncomfortable and ill-fitting. When Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) studied scholars returning home to the United States after working abroad, they realised that returning sojourners experienced a 'U'-shaped emotional trajectory like the one described by Lysgaard (1955) in people initially moving abroad and suffering 'culture shock.' That is, both moving abroad and returning home posed challenges for adaptation and coping.

Not every student will experience the same degree of reverse culture shock or re-entry shock, but for some, the experience can be more severe and disturbing than the disorientation that they felt when they went abroad. Gaw (2000: 84) reviews the literature on reverse culture shock and finds that students can suffer from a wide range of issues, including: 'academic problems, cultural identity conflict, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties... alienation, disorientation, stress, value confusion, anger, hostility, compulsive fears, helplessness, disenchantment, and discrimination.' You may experience grieving for the expatriate experience and the new life that you had while overseas. Again, however, the severity varies, and you shouldn't feel that it is 'better' to experience more profound re-entry problems or that the degree of distress is directly related to how well you adapted in the first place. Different types of transformation while abroad can produce a variety of experiences on re-entry (see Szkudlarek 2010).

Gaw (2000: 95) found, in a study of university students returning to the US after significant time abroad, that more than 20% of students complained of the following: loneliness or isolation, difficulties in adjusting to university life, depression, worries about their choice of career, feelings of alienation, and trouble studying. Gaw (2000) also discovered that the students with the most severe reverse culture shock were also those least likely to seek help, such as talking with counsellors at school. We would encourage every student to seek help if you need it, and to take advantage of informal support groups, like re-entry workshops in the international office. The hardest thing is when support is available, but students refuse to use it, even though they are finding re-adjusting to life at home difficult.

Re-entry strategies

Calm friends' fears about your changes

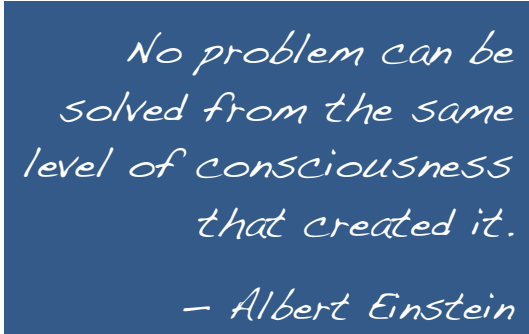
Realise that some people at home may be uncomfortable about how you have changed while overseas, and that these individuals may try to get you to forget about your experiences, 'shoebox' your memories on a kind of mental shelf, and go back to who you were. They may be afraid that you are so in love with your host country that you plan to leave again soon. They may feel like all the positive things you say about the people you met or the places you visited are implicitly criticisms of your home country or even of them. They may feel that they are directly in competition for your loyalty, threatened by any changes that you've gone through. Those closest to us may unintentionally sabotage change in us if they do not understand how that change is compatible with a continued relationship.

Try to identify their resistance, speak to their fears directly, or put them at ease. If your mother keeps saying critical things about your host country, for example, she might be afraid that you want to move away. If you drop hints that you have no intention of moving away (or tell her honestly that you want to, and for how long), she may be more supportive of your readjustment. If your boyfriend or girlfriend seems to get sensitive whenever you talk about how great university life was in the United States, or how you enjoyed travelling in Europe, try to include them in a way that helps them to realise that they are not in competition. (See also the discussion of related issues in the Transformation module.)

Find a receptive audience

When some of you return home, you may find that, for a variety of reasons, people don't want to hear about your experiences while abroad. Although you may feel like you have had a once-in-a-lifetime experience, family and friends may not want to talk repeatedly about the your host country, your adventures, or the insights that the experiences may bring.

You should look for places and times when sharing your stories makes sense. For example, take your interest in your host country into a class project for something you are studying back at your home university. Work through the international office of the university for pre-departure orientation or as a contact person about the host program. Write about the experience for a campus magazine or other forum. Offer to give tours to or mentor students on exchange from your host country to your home university. (See more ideas in the Globalisation and Cosmopolitanism module for ways to make the home campus feel more like part



*No problem can be
solved from the same
level of consciousness
that created it.
— Albert Einstein*

of the international experience.)

Be prepared for re-entry shock

The best way to prepare for the re-entry phase of a sojourn abroad is to be aware of the possibility that coming home may not go smoothly. As you get ready to return home, you may be rushing to get in last-minute trips, say 'goodbye' to new friends, and figure out how to get home more luggage than you brought. Be aware that home will probably not feel exactly the same as when you left, for a variety of reasons. In some cases, something dramatic will have happened while you were away, and missing the event will leave you feeling out of step or disoriented.

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: The unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

—George Bernard Shaw

In other cases, home will have stayed almost entirely the same, but you will have changed so that old patterns and situations seem newly uncomfortable. If you feel like a lot has happened to you while you were away, you may find that people at home haven't really kept up with the changes. Remember that, in some cases, the distance between your old place at home and your new state of mind is a measure of how far you've grown. You should be proud of the change and refuse to let it go, but should also try to maintain your sense of humour as you inevitably have to adjust (as do those around you).

Create a new space at home

Most of us who sojourn abroad will carry a part of the new world home with us when we come back; you may have developed a love of a new language, new skills, a taste for new flavours, or a greater interest in art, culture, architecture, history, or the like. Theories of cultural identity and international exchange point out that students have created a new identity in the course of adapting to a new environment. We try to remind students to keep that new identity alive; you don't have to recreate the host country at home for the identity to be nourished, but you need to create spaces where that new identity feels right.

The Globalisation and Cosmopolitanism module has many ideas for increasing your engagement with other places around the world. Your 'space' may be something as simple as 'liking' a Facebook page for a news organisation in your host country, or putting a foreign film festival into your annual calendar so that you make sure you get to see scenes shot in the city you visited. Or you may learn to cook food from your host country or make an interest you discovered overseas into a new passion. Certainly, you can plan a trip to return, but don't wait to travel to become more plugged in and connected to your host country.

‘Home’ – by Steven

It's been four months now. I've seen so much of this place. Made a lot of friends, a lot of memories, seen and done things I would never ever have imagined.

This is much like the story of every exchange student, I would imagine, but to me, it feels special. As I find myself nearing the end of my stay here in Umeå, Sweden, I feel like a little reflection is in order:

Actually, I've spent more time on my various trips around Europe than here in Umeå. Just got back from a trip further north at 1am today. I'm writing this blog now rather than later since I'm leaving again for another trip around Europe in a couple of days. Tiredness is no longer a problem, just a fact of life.

So far I have visited a whole lot of Sweden, plus bits of other countries like Poland, Finland (twice), Norway (thrice), Russia, Italy, Switzerland, France and Monaco, with plans to see Spain and Germany as well as Italy and France again before I leave - in a month.

I've been roaming around with friends I made here, friends from just about every country in the world (in fact I'm convinced Sweden has more Germans than Swedes). I have a bunch of Swedish friends as well, of course, but they are not so interested in such touristy activities...

One thing that you notice when travelling with non-native English speakers is that many will call just about anywhere "home". Instead of "let's go back to the hotel where we are staying for one night", it's "let's go home". Of course I don't feel at home in that hotel, it's just the place we sleep. In this case I usually try to correct people (which some really appreciate, more than others).

There is one case, though, when I don't feel that this is a mistake; When people say we are going "home" as we return to Umeå, then I am inclined to agree with them. I do feel like I'm coming home. This feels like home.

The snow; the cold; the sun that we never see, and the beautiful skies by which we know it is still there; this tiny little room; my curtains that I found in a dumpster - held open by a coathanger; riding my bike across the frozen lake; cooking my own food in my own shared kitchen; my housemates, about whom I know nothing, not even their names (as is the Swedish way); the times when I find myself thinking "\$5 Australian, what's that in crowns?"; the big dirty factory next door, whose smoky beacon guides me safely home from any place in town at any hour of night...

All of it. It's home.

Original available at: <http://ozstudentsabroad.com/2010/12/16/home/>



Activity

Read the two passages below and respond the questions at the end. These two examples are from authors who struggled in various ways with living abroad, eventually noticing their own strategies, both successful and unsuccessful, for dealing with the strains of adjusting to living abroad. In both cases, the travelers ended up learning about themselves and developing greater resilience through the experiencing of adapting to living abroad.

Not Smiling in France

From Iris Berdrow (2009) Designing effective global competence development opportunities. *International Journal Management in Education* 3(3/4) 335-345; p. 339.

One common experience of international travellers is the sense of 'foreignness', of being different, and that difference being obvious to others. Yet, it is not obvious what it is about oneself that is recognised as being different. It is easier to see what is different about others, but this is compared to an innate belief about right, wrong, appropriate, inappropriate, in order to register that difference. For example, while travelling in France, I noticed that people didn't smile very much. At first I registered this behaviour as rude. I had compared the common behavior I saw around me to my innate norm of smiling whenever eye contact is made. When I talked to people in France about my own cultural heritage, telling them I was Canadian, they would often talk about how friendly Canadians were and that many Canadians they had interacted with always smiled. It was then that I started considering perhaps my behaviour did not represent the global norm, but rather an extreme end of the scale and that in fact, the French norm might represent something closer to the global average. I do not know the answer, not having found a study of global smiling behaviour; however, I did register my comprehension that I had been assessing French behaviour without really understanding my own within a context of global behaviours.

This text is a wonderful contrast to read alongside *Almost French* (below) about an Australian woman living in Paris. There are stimulus questions after this piece.

Marie-Claire Patron. 2009. *Diary of a French Girl. Surviving Intercultural Encounters*. Robina, Qld: Bond University Press. Pp. 37-38.

Natalie's regular journey to university only to *checkmail*, as she put it, became obsessive, but communicating with her family was instrumental in helping her to settle down. The sad reality is that family and friends back home often neglect

this crucial aspect of the experience. Such was Natalie's obsession with e-mails that she went to the point of neglecting friendships in order to go online. She berated herself on one occasion as this addiction had even taken precedence over coffee with a Danish boy named Jason, of whom she was particularly fond.

He had needed a sympathetic ear after witnessing an accidental death at a train station on that day but she had missed the opportunity to console him because her need to connect with her loved ones had not diminished...

He was of course really upset! We spoke a little and he went to eat with a friend because I, stupid fool, went on the Internet!...

Natalie's dependence on the checkmail habit frequently gave rise to indignation when she received little news from France. Apparently, chastising family and friends was to no avail! They were still poor communicators. She was bewildered that they could not understand her reliance on reports from home but Natalie was too proud to spell this out to her family. With uncanny regularity, her diary registered this type of entry: ...

I went to Uni, then checkmail. I realize how my mood and morale are affected on a daily basis by the emails that I receive. Difficult to realise how those left in France mean so much to me! I can't go one day without checking my e-mails! How crazy is that!

Natalie recognized her dependency on messages from home, even just a quick word, and this somehow made it acceptable that her moods were influenced by them. Justifying her actions and satisfying the need come rain or shine appeared to help sustain her during difficult times, especially during the initial months when the cultural clues were missing with greater intensity. When no news came, she found it difficult to bear. Her mood swings always seemed to be determined by the day's messages. By admitting this addiction to the Internet and her predictable reactions she learned to cope with disappointments

Questions:

1. Did both travellers adapt and cope with living in a foreign land?
2. What pitfalls or roadblocks impeded the two sojourners intercultural experience?

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