

Culture Shock

Newcomers who act out in the classroom are probably suffering from culture shock. This is a term used to describe the feelings people have when they move to an unfamiliar culture. Immigrant children may become withdrawn and passive or they may be aggressive. The more different the new culture is from their own, the greater the shock. Newcomers have left behind family members, friends, teachers, and pets. They have lost their language and culture. Often they do not have the support of their parents who are in shock too.

Four Stages of Culture Shock

It must be emphasized that every child reacts differently to moving to a new place. New arrivals usually go through four stages of culture shock.

1. Euphoric or Honeymoon Stage

During this stage newcomers are excited about their new lives. Everything is wonderful and they are having a great time learning about their environment.

2. Culture Shock Stage.

The differences between the new and the native cultures becomes more apparent. Students feel overwhelmed at this stage. There is so much they do not understand about their new surroundings. They are frustrated because they can not communicate and are bombarded with unfamiliar surroundings, unreadable social signals and an unrelenting barrage of new sounds. Students suffering from culture shock may seem sleepy, irritable, disinterested or depressed. Some students may become aggressive and act out their frustrations.

Newcomers in this stage of culture shock need time and patience from their teachers.

3. Integration Stage.

Newcomers start to deal with the differences between the old culture and new. They learn to integrate their own beliefs with those of the new culture. Some newcomers will start to replace the old values with new ones. Others will begin to find ways to exist with both cultures. Many immigrant parents start to become alarmed at this stage. They do not want their children to lose their language and culture.

4. Acceptance Stage.

Newcomers are now able to enter and prosper in the mainstream culture. They accept both cultures and combine them into their lives. Some students will adopt the mainstream culture at school and follow the values of the home culture outside of school. During this stage many immigrant parents make it clear to their children that they do not want them to adopt the mainstream culture. This is because many immigrant students forget their native language and reject their culture.