

“REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK” DRAMA

By the Leeds Universities Chaplaincy Team

(Can be adapted to your situation)

Introduction

Narrator:

To illustrate some of the things that might happen to you at the end of your course, we are going to present a short drama. It begins with some international students who have just completed their MBA at the University of

Scene 1: FAREWELL TO THE UK

(A student is saying goodbye to his/her international friends and exchanging addresses)

Tina: It was so nice to meet you. I will really miss you.

Seija: I will miss you too. We have had such a good time together.

Maxim: We need to keep in touch. I will update my Facebook page when I'm at home. By the way, what do you think: I wrote this little card to my Host Family to thank them for all the good times we have shared this year. They have been so kind.

Tina: That's a good idea. I will do the same. Oh, how full my stomach is after eating all those farewell meals!

Seija: Why don't you come to visit me in Finland after you have settled down in your own countries? It would be nice to meet again and talk about our experiences.

Tina & Maxim: That's a good idea. See you in Finland! Bye, bye Tina, Bye, bye Maxim, Bye, bye Seija. (hugging)

Narrator: So our international students leave the UK. Seija at last is home on Finnish soil and there is her exited family.

Scene 2: BACK HOME

(Seija arrives home with her backpack. Father and Mother are waiting for her. Emotional welcome. Backpack is put on the floor and student takes her graduation scroll and gives it to her father and mother. Father opens the red ribbon and shows the scroll to the audience. In big letters it says 'Graduated from ----- University' (MBA). This happens near the dining table)

Seija: Mama, Papa

Mother: Darling you're back!

Father: Well done!

Seija: It is so nice to be back home again. I have missed you and I have missed Finland too. I nearly cried when I saw all the forests and lakes from the airplane when we were landing. The air is so fresh here and everything is so green. It was so nice to hear in the bus going from the airport to Helsinki, all the new Finnish songs. I'm so happy to understand everything they say!

Father: We need to have a good Sauna now as you are back. I'll go and start heating the sauna. I've already got some birch twigs to make a fresh, "vasta," to, "birch," ourselves and soften the muscles. Sauna is so relaxing after a long journey. You women can go first and after you have finished your brother and I will go for the hotter part.

Mother: Meanwhile I'll go and make us a good cup of coffee. This morning I already baked some "pulla" for us.

Seija: It is wonderful to be back home! Everything feels so Finnish here! – We even have the little rugs on the floors. I can't wait to do the summer jobs: to wash the rugs, to pick the blue berries and mushrooms in the forest... it feels fantastic!

Narrator:

(Back home; the celebrity or holiday state)

Coming home, Seija is in holiday mood and the thrill of being back protects her. On the surface everything appears to be the same as before she left. But things are just about to change as we see Seija at the meal table with her family....

Scene 3: LIFE STARTS BACK IN FINLAND

Changes in the student, family and friends; unconfirmed expectations. (Student and her family are at the dinner table discussing and catching up on news. Family members start to see the differences compared to how things were before the student left for the UK and vice versa.)

Father: Would you pass the salt, please?

Seija: Here is some salt for you Papa, although it is unhealthy to eat too much salt. Papa, you know it affects your blood pressure.

Mother: My darling, haven't you changed! You never used to talk to your Papa like that. Now you are *constantly* advising us about all these new ideas you have learnt in the UK. You look so different too – I'm not sure if I like your glasses... and have you lost some weight? I'm worried about you.

Seija: This is the new fashion now Mama. (Wearing sunglasses) I like to try new things. It is good to be "cosmopolitan". Don't worry my weight is just the same. It is normal that I seem a little different to you now. I have experienced so many new things while I have been in the UK. But how is your health? You seem so fragile now. Are you sure you are all right?! ... And what an earth have you done to your hair Mama! Shouldn't you think a bit of your age! What will the neighbours say?!

Mother: I just wanted to try something new... (Wearing a red wig), I guess the hair-dresser went a bit over the top but I like it this way, don't you Papa.

Father: Hmm.... Yes of course, it is very beautiful.

Seija: By the way when will I see my new nephew? So strange: when I left for England I had one niece and now my big brother also has a little boy. My niece did not even recognise me when I first came back. I feel I have missed out on my nephew's birth and many other things that have happened in the family when I have been away. It is terrible. I feel like I am an outsider in my own family because everything has changed so much. Even my old room is not mine any more as my little sister occupies it now. And my other big brother has been divorced. (Sighs)

Father: Of course you are part of the family. What are you talking about? Although it would have been nice to have you here when so many things have happened to us.

Seija: By the way, have you thought about getting married?

Seija: Oh, Papa! Yes of course, maybe a bit later!

Father: Why don't you go and see some of your old friends. That might cheer you up and make you feel better.

Seija: I have tried to contact my old friends already but they are all so busy. They have got their new jobs and careers and families. People I was at school with are making good progress and here am I starting all over again.

Father: Well you have done different things that other people have not had the opportunity to do.

Seija: It seems that I don't have things in common with my old friends any more. They are not interested in hearing about things that I did in the UK. Nobody understands me here...

(Crying)...Oh, Mama...(mama hugs)
Mother: Oh, darling daughter. It is all right to feel sad.
Seija: I really miss my friends in ----. I didn't think I would feel so sad, lonely and miserable coming home.
Mother: What about Anna? She was very happy to hear you were coming home.
Seija: Yes, I'm meeting with Anna this evening.
Mother: That's nice. Where are you going? What are you going to do later? When will you be coming back? Make sure you're home by 11 o'clock.
Seija: Oh, Mama & Papa you didn't know what I was doing when I went out when I was in the UK. Why are you asking all these questions now? I am used to being independent now.

Narrator:

(Unhappy stage)

Living in another country exposes you to different values, styles and beliefs. You may not be aware of it but you will have begun to adopt some of the ways of the British, especially our students. When these changes are left unrecognised and unchallenged, they become potential trouble spots back home perhaps bringing tension into your relationships. It may be useful to discuss changes that you see in yourself and changes to people at home before with your friends and family so that your expectations are more realistic.

Every returning student will experience some difficulty; the degree of difficulty depends on how long you have been away from home and your personal situation. You may feel you are at home in your country and yet a foreigner at the same time. Your feelings and moods will swing from excitement to exhaustion, and enjoyment to frustration. These emotions, you should remember, are a normal part of the transition process. Research has shown that this stress can last for 6 to 12 months or even longer.

In our next scene we follow Seija as old friends from the University of --- meet up in Finland.

Scene 4: OLD FRIENDS FROM --- ARE REUNITED

Changes at work and meeting with their old friends.

(Other students come with their bags)

Seija: WELCOME TO FINLAND! (walking towards Tina & Maxim waving a big Finnish flag) How nice to see you again Tina and Maxim. I am so glad you could come and visit me. I have really missed you.

Tina: Lovely to see you again Seija. I have missed you too.

Seija: Please come and sit down to have a cup of coffee. Did you have good flights?

(Students sitting around the coffee/dinner table exchanging news)

Maxim: I had a long delay because there was a strike so I it has taken me ages to get here.

Tina: Yes, thank you. I had very good connections so it was very pleasant.

Maxim: Great to see you again. Finland is a very beautiful country.

Seija: Thank you. So, how is life?

Tina: Do you remember all those good old times in ---?

Maxim: Funny when you mention it – I remember that refreshing rain...

Seija: How I miss fish & chips!

Maxim: I miss watching all those great football games and watching English TV!

Tina: I miss my old calm student life...

Maxim: And how about the fast Internet connections in the university. Do you remember when we used to go to the International Students Club/Globe Cafe and have those fun evenings?

Seija: I would like to be back in the UK in those carefree student days!
Tina: It seems to be such a long time ago when we were together in the UK because so many things have happened to us.
Maxim: Although it is only one year ago since we left each other! How time goes by so quickly!
Seija: Now that we have been about one year in our own countries, do you still remember what happened to you first thing after you moved back home?
Tina: What happened to me was that I went back to my old working place...and this is what happened:

(Students put wigs on their heads to imitate other persons and they go to the office table. A person is sitting on the chair by the table, Tina goes by and stands near the table)

Tina: Hello! Nice to see you again Mr Maki. Err... How are you?
Mr Maki: Hello Tina. I'm fine thank you. You see, I was appointed as Deputy Manager after you left and got this old desk of yours.
Tina: (Gulp), Yes I see ...
Manager: Hello Tina, how was England? We hear that the weather there is so terrible all the time, always raining. Is that true?
Tina: Well, it is not that terrible, really. (in a weak and apologetic manner) It rains every now and then of course, but you can get used to it. By the way I have learned a lot about new techniques and research shows that if we changed this old model to a new one, we could get much better results. Actually when I was in England I did some research about this and the results are here. (Puts a pile of papers on the table)
Mr Maki: Looks interesting but this is not England and our situation is completely different. Yes, even in the newspapers they told us about the bad weather in England: flooding and storms. I won't be going there, it sounds really awful. (Throws the papers under the table)
Manager: Yes, the English weather wouldn't suit us... so this clever university girl is back. While you were gone we have made some new arrangements. Mr Maki is now our new Deputy Manager and we will see what little corner of the office we can arrange for you....
Tina: Yes...but you promised me a promotion... and I have learned so many things in England
Manager: Would you please stop talking about England. Yes, my girl, you see Mr Maki is very experienced and he is doing a good job. But we have been thinking about you too! Mr Maki and I ordered a new table and a chair for you – here they are – (Mr Maki brings a small table and a children's plastic chair in the middle of the scene). I'm so sorry there seems to have been some confusion about the size!!!! But it is not our fault! (Tina tries the small chair)

(Students go back to the coffee table to talk about what has happened)

Tina: So, can you imagine what a shock I had when I went back to work.
Seija: How did you feel?
Tina: I felt awful...buhuuuu (cries on Seija's shoulder) I felt like I wanted to be alone or back in the UK. Everybody was so rude to me.
Seija: Sometimes it makes you feel better if you have a good cry.
Maxim: I found out it is best not to expect too much when you go back home. Many things have changed also in our work places while we have been away.
Tina: Some people seem to find it hard if women have got more education than they have. There were many hidden feelings that caused a lot of tension between my colleagues and me.
Maxim: Perhaps you could think about the skills that you have learnt in the UK and discuss with your boss how they can be useful in your workplace.
Seija: Maybe it is also good not to take all the criticism so seriously and to congratulate people when they have done well and not to mention too much of your own overseas training!
Tina: Maybe people also think that the person who has studied abroad feels superior to them and that's why they resent and reject their ideas.

Seija: Yes, there can be a lot of prejudice about overseas training. When going back it is also good to read recent reports and catch up with the latest minutes and newsletters. The best way is to suggest change bit by bit, not all at once, by consulting, negotiating and allowing ideas to take root.

Tina: Let's imagine how it could go better.

(Mr Maki sitting on a chair by the table, Tina is standing)

Tina: Hello! Nice to see you again Mr Maki. How are you?

Mr Maki: Hello Tina. I'm fine thank you. You see, I was appointed as Deputy Manager after you left and got this old desk of yours.

Tina: Congratulations, well done Mr Maki. I'm so glad to hear that things have worked out so well for you. Do you like my old desk?

Mr Maki: Yes, it's great.

Manager: Hello Tina, how was England? We hear that the weather there is so terrible all the time, always raining. Is that true?

Tina: England is not so bad thank you and after all the rain can feel quite refreshing, don't you think so?! By the way before I left, the firm was interested in investing in some new projects. So what has happened with them?

Manager: Yes, it has been going alright, however, we now need some new expertise....

Mr Maki: Yes, there is a lot for us to catch up on....

Manager: So what have you learned in the big world?

Tina: Actually that is what I wanted to discuss with you; how would my new skills best be used in the firm now that so many changes have taken place? Would it be possible for me to make an appointment with you and talk about this in more detail?

Manager: Yes of course, how about first thing tomorrow morning?

Tina: That's fine, thank you.

Narrator:

(Despair stage)

During the unhappy and despairing stages you discover that your time as a "celebrity" returning from a glamorous western University is over and you are now faced with the daily demands of life and work back home. You may even start wishing you were back in the UK where life seemed carefree and you had lots of friends. Once you have settled back in home you may feel frustrated and angry at your situation and you may begin to criticise others and start to distance yourself from them. In the workplace people may expect great things from you as the newly returned expert or they may resent you perhaps out of jealousy. But gradually you will start to move into the confident stage, you will start to deal with some of these conflicts, find your old self again and feel you are making a positive contribution again.

Maxim: When I went back this is what happened to me with my old friends.

(Students put different hats/scarves to imitate other people. Tina and Seija coming from one direction and Maxim, wearing a hat with a British flag on it, coming from the opposite one, meeting in the middle)

Maxim: Hello. Greetings from England! How are you?

Friend 1: Hi, there. We are fine. Good to see you back.

Friend 2: Yes, nice to see you again. How was England?

Maxim: Well, funny that you happen to ask me. I have got some photos on my iPad here to show you. (Showing photos) Here is ---, and this is the University, here is my good friend Richard with whom I spent a lot of time. We used to watch the cricket matches together. The Ground was quite near our apartment so it was very convenient. Richard used to say that life without cricket is very boring, Richard was so good at cricket himself, you should have seen him playing...

- Friend 1:* (Looks bored and checks the time on her watch every now and again. Looks interesting but we don't play cricket here.)
- Friend 2:* We have just got our new mountain bikes. Did you know that we have joined the Cycling Club and are training for the big race next year. In fact I've got my photos here. (Shows pictures from her phone to Maxim) Look here are the new bikes. Here is the mountain. Here is the first puncture. This is the whole group.
- Friend 1:* Here we are cleaning the bikes... This is the bike from front and... from side and... from the back. Great bikes aren't they?!
- Maxim:* Yes, of course, great bikes (looks bored and checks the time on his watch regularly). I think I need to go now.
- Friend 1:* We need to go for our training too, see you again sometime.
- Maxim:* See you.

(Students go to the coffee table)

- Maxim:* What did I do wrong here?
- Tina:* Often it is better to listen more than to talk, and to show interest in what has been happening in your friends' lives while you have been away. Of course it is important to congratulate your friends when they have achieved some important goals in their lives while you were in the UK.
- Seija:* Yes. Firstly it is very important to show an interest in what has happened to your friends, and to tell them only a little bit about your international experiences. Next time maybe you can tell something more but it is good just to keep it short and not to bore your friends.
- Tina:* People are not so interested in seeing a lot of photos either.
- Seija:* It is good to ask your friends questions to show your interest.
- Maxim:* Let's imagine we could do it better.

(Students go back to the office table)

- Maxim:* Hello everybody! Greetings from England! How are you?
- Friend 1:* Hi, there. We are fine. Good to see you back.
- Friend 2:* Yes nice to see you again. How was England?
- Maxim:* Not so bad thank you, but what have YOU been doing all this time when we have not seen each other? You look so good and healthy too.
- Friend 1:* Yes, you see we have bought new mountain bicycles and have started to train for next years racing competition.
- Friend 2:* It has certainly been good for our health! But you look very fit too, so what have you been doing?
- Maxim:* I have learned how to play cricket but I got a new friend in England, Robert, and he really likes cycling. He is coming to visit me next month.
- Friend 2:* It would be nice to meet your friend and talk about cycling if he comes here.
- Friend 1:* Yes, and I've seen cricket matches on the TV but I don't understand the rules so it would be nice to learn more about it. Maybe you could explain the rules and what happens in a match.
- Maxim:* Of course it would be my pleasure! I'll tell you more about it when we meet next. And I will come and watch you next year when you are taking part in the racing competition. Good luck with your training! Have you got a good coach?
- Friend 2:* Very good thank you. See you again soon.

Narrator:

(Confident stage)

Strangely you may have to relearn your home culture. You may have to copy what others are doing. Or another danger is to fall back into old routines and patterns from when you were perhaps a lot younger. You may find that the things you used to love doing are no longer appealing. A year or two years in another country has made you a different person with new ideas and values. Not everyone will be happy with this and you might have to rebuild some relationships. To escape, some may seek understanding from other

returning students. You may find yourself longing for the lifestyle and friends that you had in the UK. There may be loneliness and isolation. Isolation is not all bad. You may welcome times to be alone as a break from the stress and tiredness of reverse culture shock, but you mustn't hide from all opportunities to grow, to relate and give to other people. However, if you alienate yourself too much, you may develop a negative attitude towards your home culture and not be aware of changes to yourself. On the other hand, some students re-socialize into their home culture, distancing themselves from the overseas culture and therefore not benefiting from the time spend abroad. The best coping strategy is a proactive one where students have appreciation of both cultures.

Scene 5: HOW ABOUT THE WORLD?

Changes in the country

(Students stand in the middle area drinking mugs of tea)

Seija: How about a cup of English tea?!

Maxim: I'd love to have a cup of tea!

Seija: It was two sugars wasn't it?!

Maxim: Yes, please.

Tina: Yes, tea please, certainly. No sugar, thank you!

Maxim: It is so good to meet up with you, and share all our different experiences. But what about your countries? Had they changed while you were in the UK?

Seija: Yes, In Finland we now have a new woman president and for a while we also had a woman prime minister. There seems to be a lot of new things going on in the government...

Tina: In my country there has been economic recession. And there are a lot of unemployed people at the moment. So it is extremely hard to find a job even with my new qualifications.

Maxim: In my country they have been involved in a war and it has affected people very deeply. Many are left very disillusioned and angry. People have lost their loved ones and their homes and businesses.

Tina: So what has helped you to cope with all these changes: in your identity, with family & friends, in the workplace and in the changing political and economic conditions in your country, as well as changes in values, cultures and ideas?

Maxim: I have participated in an Alumni association event in my home country that was a great occasion. Another thing that has really helped as well has been to talk with my international friends through e-mail and Facebook, and to try to recognise the changes and adjust to them. For example we remembered that when we first moved to England all this happened to us in reverse. I try to remember what I did to cope with the changes then.

Seija: Yes, it has helped me too to try to understand the problem and to think about a way to cope with it. For example, if I feel very upset or frustrated I try to have a break and do something I have always enjoyed doing, like going swimming or walking my dog!

Tina: Yes, it takes a lot of energy to adapt back again and to shift the way we communicate. But we can make it!

Maxim: You are right, reverse culture shock is just another new experience. All the time we are learning new things on many different levels. Actually I guess we will keep on learning all our lives. It is good to remember all that we gained while studying in the UK.

Seija: I have really enjoyed your company here in Finland. Thank you so much for coming. Let's go and meet my family once again. My mother has invited you for a cup of coffee and Finnish "pulla" and cakes.

(Students go as the narrator comes on stage)

Narrator:

Just as you experienced culture shock when you came to the UK, so you will experience some problems when you get home. Try to remember that this is normal. It is a common experience for those who have been away from home for any length of time.

Without abandoning your newly acquired values, you will gradually find that you have a new appreciation for your home culture and an increasing ability to relate on different levels. One researcher has said:

Returning home is like being in two worlds, you will never fully be able to go home again, because you will always leave part of yourself behind. Therefore you will be split between two worlds. Home may be in more than one place. This is the price you pay for experiencing more than one culture in a deep way.

This sounds rather morbid but “Congratulations!” Being able to survive and succeed in a different culture has given you a new life skill, a skill that will give you a new found confidence in yourself and your abilities. You have had a rich experience of a new culture and learned things about yourself that will help you in your life journey. “Well done.”

But we haven’t quite finished. We have to see our international students one more time as they chat together with Seija’s family, just before parting once more again each to their own country. They are now fully into the independent stage....

Scene 6: THE SHOCK IS OVER!

(The family and the students sit together around a table and drink coffee)

Mother: Please, take more “pulla” and cakes.

Tina & Maxim: Thank you.

Seija: Would you like some more coffee?

Tina: Yes, please.

Father: So, I hear that all of you have found good jobs after all. Tell me all about it.

Maxim: I saw an advertisement online and got an interview. They thought that despite my age I had the best qualifications and gave me the post. I was so glad...

Tina: My friend saw this post advertised in his company and thought it might interest me. So he phoned me and that’s how it happened.

Mother: Sounds very good. So you’re totally past the feelings of ‘reverse culture shock’ now then? Do you think you have learned anything from the experience?

Tina: Oh, yes. I think reverse culture shock really happens to everyone to some degree and it is a good idea to be prepared to take some time to adjust to being back home again. It will be easier next time.

Maxim: I once heard a good short story about coming back from being in another country: In the story some western people were travelling with native people in America. After a few of days of travelling the native people stopped and sat down. The westerners were wondering why and the native people very wisely explained that they sat down so that their souls could catch up with their bodies.

Tina: What a lovely story. Thank you. I think it is so true.

Seija: Yes, I really feel that I have needed all this time to adjust back home. Only now do I start to feel that life is good again. I have got a new job and my old friends have accepted me back in Finland. Some months ago I went to visit the UK and then came back to Finland again. This time it wasn’t as difficult moving from one culture to another because I knew what to expect. We experienced big changes going through culture shock and reverse culture shock but, after all, the experience has been well worth all the difficulties.

Maxim: And do you know what: my younger sister is going to study in the UK next year.

Seija: Lucky her! Hope she will enjoy the International Students Club/Globe Cafe and university life as much as we did.

Tina: I have got some news for you too: I'm getting married next month! Here is the picture of my fiancé (a big picture of a man with a funny hat) he is my old friend who helped me to get back to normality in my home country.

Maxim: Congratulations!

Seija: I am so glad for you. May you be very happy together. Thank you ever so much for coming to Finland. I have really enjoyed your company and our discussions.

Maxim: Why don't you come to my country next year? It would be nice to see what has happened to us by then.

Tina: Yes, let's do that.

Seija: Good idea. I like travelling!

Tina: I love to get to know new cultures!

THE END

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