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SPECIFIC CHARACTER OF BOARDING EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. ADAPTATION OF OVERSEAS STUDENTS FROM FORMER POST SOVIET UNION COUNTRIES

British boarding schools are believed to be the best in the world, since Britain seems to be the most popular choice for international students seeking boarding education.

There has never been a better time to become a boarder at a British boarding school: standards in education and in pastoral care have probably never been higher.

The British system of school education, however, is likely to be different to the Ukrainian or Russian educational systems. Students progress through the British system according to their age, not according to their ability. The ability levels of each student are measured by examinations. These include some special government-licensed examinations including GSCE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) at the age of 16 or 17, or «A» level, IB or Pre-U (Advanced level, International Baccalaureate or Pre-University) at the age of 18 or 19.

Students can start at some British boarding schools (Prep Schools) as young as 7 years old, but move on to secondary school or high school at the age of 11 or 13 years old. The ideal ages to transfer to secondary level education are 11, 13, 14 or 16 years old.

British boarding schools usually require students to have at least elementary standard English, but most schools can provide help for students whose level of English needs further improvement. There are schools that are specially designed to help non-British students join the British education system and these are usually called International Study Centres.

Different boarding schools in the United Kingdom, nearly three thousand schools, cater for a wide variety of children. But what they have in common, is their care and concern for each individual child entrusted to them, and their dedication to ensuring that each child is happy, thrives and succeeds, whatever their interest and talents.

The advantage of a boarding school education is in helping to develop in each individual the following: confidence, independence, cultural awareness, respect for others, self-motivation, self-discipline, responsibility and a wide variety of interests.

Boarders feel that they have a great school life with the opportunity to have an enhanced education and friends for life, greater access to school facilities, good working relationship with teachers.

In the context of increasing recruitment of overseas students by British education institutions, there also has been a growing need to understand the process of students' intercultural adaptation and the approaches that can be adopted by British academic institutions in order to facilitate and support these students' learning experience in the UK. British scientists explore the three-fold 'stress-adaptation-growth' intercultural learning process of these participants by focusing the discussions on the overseas students' life experience in the UK. The key argument is that intercultural adaptation is in itself a process of intercultural learning, which has the potential to bring about profound changes in overseas students themselves, transforming their understanding of the learning experience, self-knowledge, awareness of the other, and values and worldview.

Overseas students bring to Great Britain a very different cultural, social and intellectual experience from that which awaits them. Reviews of previous studies suggest that their beliefs, values and attitudes to knowledge, to styles of learning and study can lead to study shock. A questionnaire survey of a sample of 133 first year overseas students, mainly from Former Post Soviet countries, compared to local students the overseas group, had significantly greater difficulties adjusting to academic requirements, particularly with regard to managing the demands

of study, specifically study methods, independent learning, language skills, participation and time management. The overseas students manifested significantly higher degrees of various stress indicators than the local students. More academic and counselling support and resources for this increasing intake of overseas students should be provided.

English boarding schools are expecting from overseas students:

- To improve their English.
- Be culturally aware.
- Academically succeed.
- Improve knowledge of the host culture.
- Contribute to the school Community.
- Contribute to the local Community.

From the other side we have factors, which effect ease of integration of overseas students, such as:

- Age of students.
- English language level.
- Previous experience abroad.
- Culture of origin.
- Proportion of students from the same language background.
- Culture shock/clash.
- Personality of each student.
- Degree of support received.

The whole adaptation process for overseas students, usually takes 10-12 months of the first year at the boarding school/college here, in the United Kingdom.

If we could draw a simple graph, which shows dependence of the Degree of Adjustments from length of period of Adaptation for overseas student in their first year, we would notice for the period of first 4-5 months, the degree of adjustments is going down to a very low point. This point is reached during a 4-5 months period, when all students have the well-known Cultural Shock or Cultural Clash. It is a very difficult time in the child's life abroad.

With the complex organization of different types of support, such as boarding houses and the school itself, appointed guardian, the parents and friends with previous experience of similar situations, this time could be last for another 4-6 months, time of Recovery.

We would like to note, what is included in a child's life style whilst boarding and what has been changed, compared with previous experience in their own schools, that would be as follows: school, type of accommodation, people around, rules/ routine, laws, educational system, spoken language, customs, food, weather, clothes, sense of freedom, appearance. Whole range of social and even domestic factors.

We have to include in solving a main problem of adaptation -cultural shock, our students are to going through.

The term «culture shock» originated in the 1950s. Basically it describes the physical and emotional discomforts that occur when someone moves from one cultural environment to another. There are several stages to culture shock. In the holiday stage, which is the period just before and just after the move everything is new and exciting. One feels very energetic, enthusiastic and hopeful about everything in life. This is followed by the deterioration/ falling apart stage during which there may be great feelings of dissatisfaction. Things are difficult and one's excitement turns to distress. One goes through communication difficulties, impatience, anger, grief, and a feeling of inexperience. There is more hope during the adjustment stage. This is when you can see some direction, you are able to laugh at yourselves again and life begins to feel a bit more balanced. During the orientation stage there is an increasing feeling of confidence and a sense of belonging.

One starts to make connections within the new culture, and starts to enjoy many aspects of many of the customs and cultural conventions. It becomes easier to adopt these practices and make them part of your life and daily routine. Lastly, repatriation is when one returns to the «home country». A «reverse culture-shock» is often experienced. Re-adjusting to the old culture is as hard as, and may be even more difficult than the original move.

Symptoms of the Cultural Shock:

- State of loss and desire for the familiar. Children feel over patriotic for their own country, shown more emotions towards their native heroes, native music, films, humour , food ,traditions and so on.

- Disorientation and confusion. Lack of knowledge of the routine and traditions of British life and institutions,

- Feeling helpless and withdrawn.

- Anxiety and stress.

- Feeling emotional,

- Difficulties with concentration and exhaustion,

- Health problems.

Tips for coping with the Cultural shock are as following:

Expect there to be differences. Depending on where you are going, everything around your (from the language to the housing to the food) may be completely different. Embrace the differences and try to avoid comparing the unfamiliar with the familiar. Spend some time researching your destination. The more you know about where you are going then the more prepared you will be to handle the differences in the cultures or situations. Laugh! Keeping a sense of humor when things are difficult or uncomfortable can help you survive any situation. Mistakes happen when you step out of your element so be ready to laugh along with the people around you when those mistakes happen to you. Stay focused on the positive. Any situation can be miserable if you are looking for the negatives around every turn. Find the things that you like and enjoy about your new situation and stay focused on those. Expect to miss home. There is nothing wrong with missing your own bed, the special meal your family had on weekends or other unique aspects of your home life. Expecting homesickness will help you cope with it if (or when) it comes. Use those days to call or contact the most upbeat person that you left behind and you will be smiling before the conversation closes. Adventure is not always easy. Stepping out of your comfort zone often means stepping into a little discomfort. Dealing with culture shock is easier when you know what to expect.

How can students help themselves?

- Be prepared before and on arrival. Gets informed about culture and the schools organization in the United Kingdom;

- Treat as adventure and an opportunity!

- Do not be hard on yourself when you are making mistakes.

- Do not make any conclusions, give yourself enough time! Just follow routine.

- Make a big effort! Make a contact.

- Ask questions.

- Expect to use initiative.

- Keep a diary, or ,even, video diary.

- Do not generalize. Respect your host country and try not to compare with your homeland.

- Force yourself to speak English.

More ideas:

- Eat well and keep healthy.

- Do plenty of exercises and have time off.

- Make a contact with people with the same language.

- Approach staff with the problems.

With regards to monitoring a progress of overseas students, what can be done there:

- Good induction program.
- Prime students in advance (guardians, tutors, senior students).
- Provide practical service to deal with «red tape», to make transition less stressful.
- Provide good academic support.
- Communication «Through out».

People, who is in charge of monitoring process are: tutors, teachers, boarding house staff, appointed Guardian (advantage to have the same native language), parents (via telephone, and others interactive communicative ways, such as Skype, e-mailing etc).

Complete monitoring system includes:

- Target setting and regular personal feedback;
- Parents evenings, Meetings with teachers on individual request by parents through Guardian or themselves.
- Good communication system: school-guardian-parents-guardian-school.

It is very important to have an academic support, which can be arranged through:

- Extra English classes;
- EAL support.(English as an Additional Language);
- ESOL exams,(English for Speakers of Other Languages);
- Study skills support. (there is a big difference in the United Kingdom education system from other countries, especially European);
- British Culture Course;
- Intercultural training;
- Tutoring;
- Training for mainstream subjects teachers;
- Academic clubs and societies.

Pastoral support, which is providing through whole boarding life must include the follows:

- Religious and national festivals;
- Intercultural activities;
- Boarding House activities;
- Holiday courses;
- International meals;
- Host families and integration into social life.

Boarding houses staff have to remember to keep up with some rules, such as :

- Summarise. Ask for feedback.
- Be patient when listening.
- Watch domestic behaviour.
- Intercultural tensions.
- Delivery of speech.

Every student from abroad, who is studying in the United Kingdom at a boarding school has to have a legal, appointed Guardian. Thoroughly checked by British Criminal Records Bureau and accredited by a special Social Institution, Guardians must have British citizenship and a special ability to deal with children of different ages.

There are over 20 accredited Guardianship Companies in the United Kingdom, based on their Status and following the main principles of the Children act 1989.

The points, our company «English Education and Guardianship»considers important, are as follows:

1. To support our students with a process of preparation and adaptation to a new environment and educational system. 1. To be there for the student as a family, to help them in any personal, academic, travel requirements, that he/she may need during their time here, in the UK. 2. To provide or arrange accommodation and transport for the pupil in so far as this has not been, or cannot be done by the parents; *during school/college holidays, half-terms and exams; *if the school/college has to close temporarily, because of an emergency e.g. fire or epidemic; *if the pupil is suspended or expelled, or has to have a period away from school/college on medical advice. 3. To help them experience cultural aspects of our country. 4. To assist with interviews for universities with parents guidance. 5. To maintain contacts with pupils' tutors, headmaster and to visit parents meetings or any other school functions, where parents normally attend. 6. To take decisions in emergencies on behalf of the parents in cases where the school or college is not empowered to do so. 7. To be responsible for passport and inoculations being kept up to date. And to report to parents regarding any developments or problems concerning the above responsibilities.

Other factors, that would effect Russian speaking students' Adaptation

I have come across a few cultural specific factors which would effect their adaptation.

1. Problems relating to the language differences

The first difficulty our overseas students encounter is the language barrier. According to the research, which taken place in the boarding schools we are dealing with in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, the majority (59%), answered that they have problems which come from the language barrier. They say that this language barrier had a tremendous psychological effect on them. In Russia or Ukraine, they learn English as a subject at school, but it is only for the purpose of entrance examination for high school and university. They do not learn conversational English or speak English very much. When our students come to the U.K., they cannot communicate as they wish. Subsequently, they experience a sense of frustration and it sometimes leads them to withdraw from other people. The situation also creates lack of confidence within themselves. In addition, they feel powerless because they cannot do what the majority does and power dynamics can occur.

Many children blame themselves thinking that they are incompetent in learning English, when they do not learn quickly enough as they expected. They emphasize their inadequacy and lose confidence.

In fact, when Russian speaking children come to the U.K. to learn English for short term English courses, they expect to make friends with British people. However, they do not have British people in class, since British people do not need to learn English as a second language. In that case, Russian speaking people only have opportunities to communicate with people from their own culture, but not with British people. When they get to know some British people, they cannot enter the social circle. They feel that British people are reserved and they feel marginalized. A client, boy 16 years old from Russia, told me that he was very disappointed about his life in the U.K. He wanted to learn English and British culture. He read many brochures about English schools and he chose one. He came to the U.K. expecting to make many British friends and learn the culture from the environment. However, the reality was different. The only British person he talked to was his English teacher. Outside school, it was difficult to make friends. Then he started to think, «What am I doing here?» and started to get depressed. Many children feel very depressed in the beginning of new life in the boarding schools. They want to change themselves in the new environment, but nothing is going right according to their expectations. Their English does not progress as they wished. They start to experience disillusionment about their study, their life in the U.K. and themselves. The language barrier would affect their adaptation.

2. Motivation and pressure to perform well

Motivation could be one of the key issues to influence adaptation to another society (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Many students come to the U.K. to study not only for their own sake, but also to meet other people's expectations, such as parents, benefactors, schools or communities. Norbeck and DeVos (1972) explain that when one fails to meet social expectations, he/she hurts family

members. As a result, he/she suffers unhappiness and feelings of guilt. Students are also under tremendous pressure not to fail since if they do, they would become the shame of the group they belong to. Pedersen (1981, p.13) explains, «Guilt is internalised conscience which prevents deviation from cultural norms and enforces conformity. Shame is less dependent on internalised norms and depends on real or projected power by others in the school to punish deviation from cultural norms.» When Russian or other Russian speaking students experience burn out and drop out of their classes at school, they feel that they cannot go back to their home country, because they cannot face the shame. They always carry the burden of the pressure not to be a source of shame. In my previous research, a participant was selected from Moscow to come to the U.K. to study. A girl, 14 years old was under enormous pressure to perform well since she had a sense that her stay in the UK was being paid for in Russia by her Father, successful and respected businessman. She also felt that she was not worthy of this role. She suffered from tremendous pressure and this affected her adaptation enormously

3. Difference of communication style and education system

The relationship between teachers and students in Former Post Soviet Union Countries is different from that in the U.K. Teachers concentrate on grammar and written language and students are doing a lots of homeworks and do not have much opportunity to communicate by English, that is the dynamics of the relationship at most of secondary schools. It is often the case that during the class the teacher just talks, and when the teacher does ask questions, students hardly ever answer. Students play a passive role still. According to the study of Thompson, Ishii, and Klopff (1990), Eastern European students showed less assertiveness and more apprehension and reticence about interacting orally with others than Americans did. When Russian speaking students come to the West, many of them are very quiet. It is partly due to the language problem, but at the same time, they are not used to participating in the class actively.

In the U.K., academic staff experience Russian speaking students' attitude as lack of confidence. Children from Russian or Ukraine are humble in expressing even their achievements. This can be taken as self-critical or element of cultura not to show off yourself. Due to this cultural and communication style, students can be evaluated differently. They feel that the teacher's evaluation of them is that they are incompetent and worry that they might get bad marks. Then they lose even more confidence.

A boarding school teachers told me that one of the differences between the Russian students and British students is in note-taking in class. Students try to copy down what is written very neatly on flipcharts or on the blackboard, whereas British students take a note consisting of their own words using their creativity.

British school /colleges teachers would expect primary school pupils to copy, but not middle or high school's education students. This would come across as being rather childlike. They are worried that they might not be taken serious or they might not be heard. However, it is not just the language barrier, but their passive attitude which might result in creating the childlike image.

Many Russian speaking students I have seen ,express their dissatisfaction towards their tutors, academic staff or schools. They seem to feel that tutors do not show enough commitment that they often postpone the appointments for their tutorials, that they do not give enough suggestions or feedback. They do not feel supported when they ask questions in their studies, and they feel that their teachers are not sensitive enough to overseas students' needs, etc. Many students even feel that they are not getting what their parents pay for. However, when I talk to academic staff, they say that they are willing to help Russian speaking students and tell them to come to talk to them when they have problems. However, boys and girls do not come asking for help. They just answer «I am all right.», when academic staff ask after them. There seems to be a big gap between communication and cultural differences.

Recommendation for teachers and Guardians ,who are dealing with the adaptation of overseas students can help to avoid major problems with the adaptation process and make overseas students feel happier and easy to settle in the new life in the United Kingdom.

1. Communication with ESOL students.

- Speak slowly.
- Speak simply.
- Avoid slang and jargon.
- Avoid question tags.
- Be firm.
- Write down important information.
- Summarise. Ask for feedback.
- Be patient when listening.
- Ask open ended question «Why?...».

2. Be aware of cultural differences.

- Educational background and academic Expectations.
- Independence.
- Personal space.
- Gender roles.
- Attitudes to authority.(respect teachers, etc).
- Body language and expression.

3.To provide tailor made support to each individual school, college or university. This has to be done through the appointing of a British Guardian for each overseas student.

In conclusion I would strongly recommend that the first year of a pupils education in the British Educational System must be fully supported-academically, socially, pastoral and by the students families. Every new pupil must learn to adapt to a new country with a different language, traditions and may be a different way of teaching. They must learn not to compare and criticise, but to be respectful and accept what is before them, a wonderful opportunity to be educated in the United Kingdom and learn the English language.

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