

Culture Shock in the School

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In coming to Korea, I had no idea what to expect. I knew, only, to expect a culture completely different from my own. So, during my first week of school, everything seemed calm and normal. Nothing seemed too extreme because I didn't have to teach the first week. I just came to school to get settled in. The principal was very kind, the few students that I saw were excited, and the teachers were all very welcoming. However, when I actually started teaching classes is when I noticed a difference between Korean schools and American schools.

The thing that shocked me the most, I would have to say, is the absence of personal space. When I walked into the classroom for the first time and saw boy students sitting on each other and being very friendly, I was shocked! I couldn't believe that they were holding hands, touching each other's faces, and (as stated before) sitting on each other. Seeing the boys being this close was completely unexpected! Back home, two men would NEVER be that close. They are very particular about their personal space. Personal space is a *very* big deal back in my home country. Most people, in general (but especially men), like to be a certain distance away from other people. We call that personal space our "bubble". However, after coming out to Korea, I've found that the "bubble" is non-existent.

Even when me and my co-teacher's would hang out, sometimes they would hold my arm or my hand. Being a woman, it was a *little* awkward, but nothing that really offended me. However, when I saw grown, adult men walking together holding arms and hands, it was quite shocking. I couldn't believe that people's relationships were *that* close out here. On the other hand, though, it was strange to see how distant male and female relationships were. The longer I taught, the more I realized that girls and boys do not want to work together (or do anything together, for that matter). So, whenever the teacher would arrange girls to sit next to boys in the class, they would not communicate with each other or work well together as a team. Again, it was quite strange for me to see that kind of relationship because we are so open about boy-girl relationships in my home country.

Overall, I would have to say that learning about relationships in Korean life was definitely the most shocking, yet interesting experience that I've had. It's completely different from my home country, but not in a bad way. It's just different and takes some time getting

used to it. After spending some time in Korea, it gets easier to adapt to that kind of situation. To help myself understand better, I would just always remember (and think to myself) that it's a different culture, so I should appreciate and respect it without judgment.

