Educare December 2016

Eurotck 2017

The next European TCK conference will be held from the 11th – 15th May in Germany. This conference gathers together European TCKs, staff from international schools, organisations that send and support third culture families, and anyone else concerned for the education and welfare of TCKs. Eurotck re-launched European TCK conferences back in 2007 and this will be the fourth one. The timetable includes seminar options on a wide range of educational and welfare themes. The keynote speaker in plenary sessions will be Christian Quartier of Le Rucher Ministries which focuses on member care for third culture families.
As with the previous conference in 2013 it will be held at the Freizeitheim in Friolzheim near Stuttgart.

This is a great opportunity, not just for learning from the sessions, but also for networking with many like-minded people who care about our TCKs. For further details and to make a booking go to http://www.eurotck.net/

Family accountability in missions

The book, *Family accountability in missions*, was edited by Jonathan Bonk with Dwight Baker, Nelson Jennings, Jin Bong Kim and Steve Sang-Cheol Moon. It was published by OMSC Publications in 2013

From the early1990s onwards the number of expatriates originating from Korea has massively increased. Very large numbers of these expatriates work with Korean-led organisations, but there are many others working with international organisations alongside colleagues from all over the world. This trend has been very marked in mission work, so that for some years now a number of MK schools have had a majority of Koreans in the student body. A lot of other schools have sufficient numbers for them to be a major nationality group. When the 30,000+ company workers, diplomats and other expatriates with their families are added in, the need for those working with Korean TCKs to understand the special considerations they have becomes clear.

This book is an excellent resource to help staff in international schools and North American or European-led organisations to understand their Korean co-workers and their children.

Among others, issues such as re-entry, language concerns, overseas education, long-term planning, and financial support in mission families are all considered. Each chapter is followed by a response by a different author, thus ensuring that these difficult issues are tackled from at least two different perspectives.

The book can be found from online sellers such as www.Amazon.com

Social Media Use: the Good and the Under-age

Last year on a school visit I was present as a staff member explained to a twelve-year old why it was not yet appropriate to sign up for Facebook. The child was an MK.

During a safeguarding investigation a child mentioned unsuitable material on the Facebook page of another child. The concern expressed was only about the material; posting up on social media was accepted as normal. The child was ten years old and an MK.

These stories are not remotely unusual. In theory children under 13 are not allowed to have a social media account; but in reality things are very different. In a 2016 survey* around 78% of under-13s were using at least one social media network. The most popular sites were Facebook and Instagram (49% and 41% of all under-13s respectively). Facebook refuses access if a user types in an under-age date and Instagram bans under-13s. However, all that an under-age user needs to do is type in an older birth date or ignore the rule where a site does not ask for the date. There are almost no identity checks, which make access really easy.

So what? Why is there an age limit of 13 in the first place? And, given that the large majority of 10-12 year olds are on social media, is it much of an issue anyway?

The age limit is set by US COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) law which requires online services to secure "verifiable parental consent" from younger (i.e. those under 13) users. The law is in place to do exactly what it says which is to guard children's privacy and therefore protect them from online exploitation. All services based in the USA have to comply with COPPA.

If children are using social media as in the instances above then they have had to lie, or at least conceal information about their age to do something that is illegal. The fact that a large majority of others do the same thing does not make it less illegal, just impossible to police. Many parents are unaware that their under-age children are using social media, so they cannot take any action because of ignorance. However, many more parents do know and give at least tacit approval by their inaction. There are two problems with this for parents in mission. One is that they are accepting that their children are breaking the law – a law in place for good reasons – the other is an acceptance of lying and deceit in order to do so. Obviously both of these totally contradict the message that we bring.

So what can be done?
There needs to be an awareness of the huge pressures on children to be part of the social media world – almost all teens over 13 use the sites and for most it is a major part of their lives. Whilst it is not right for young children to be users, it is important to educate them as soon as possible about the all aspects of the internet, including social media. This includes understanding how to maximise the enormous potential of connectedness and information exchange that social media can bring (when they are old enough) and being aware of both the advantages and the drawbacks. Once children are allowed access, a mixture of supervision and ongoing education is needed especially in the early stages. Some mistakes are inevitable as they learn

how it works, but it is crucial to give enough support and guidance so that the worst mistakes can be avoided. Otherwise there can be catastrophic results. However there should be a focus on positive use and not just the prevention of negative consequences.

* From 2016 Safer Internet Day quoted on http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35524429
This site gives good advice for parents http://vodafonedigitalparenting.co.uk/

TCKs for life

Just two months ago I attended a funeral celebrating the long and productive life of someone whom I have known for as long as I can remember. This lady was one of my Sunday school teachers from a very young age, was a leading figure for many years in the church I grew up in, and encouraged us in our mission work to the end of her life.

Roots and Belonging

Given my many moves as an adult my Sunday school teacher was a real rarity – in fact outside of my family members there are only a handful of others that I have known for so long. High mobility in childhood means that a similar experience would be typical for TCKs, in fact for many there may even be no one outside of the family that they have known and been in regular contact with throughout their lives. Having so few people like that influences the lack of rootedness felt by many TCKs. For me, as an adult mover, the difference is that my identity was shaped in one location as a child and most of my family still live there: despite the many moves since leaving my childhood home there is still some sense of where my roots are. For TCKs this is rarely true with the multiple cultures that shaped their childhood lives. A lack of rootedness in one place is an almost universal TCK experience, probably as much so as the mixed feelings about the question "Where do you come from?"

So what are the implications and effects of this?

There are some TCKs and observers who question whether childhood global nomads can ever adapt to just one culture and stick to it. Adult cultural understanding is made up from the mixture of childhood plus subsequent adult experiences. Some view it as impossible "to go home again" and feel really settled because home is in a mixture of the places a TCK grew up in. On the other hand many TCKs carry their many homes with them in their hearts and minds (and sometimes in an eclectic mix of possessions) wherever they go. The feelings of most TCKs towards the passport country are permanently changed by a mobile childhood, but that does not have to be negative. On the contrary, the ability to see one's own passport culture from an outside, more global, perspective can be a great advantage in a fast-changing world.

One message I like to get across when speaking with TCKs is that it is positive and normal to have roots in different places and different loyalties. Why should there be any idea that it is not? Given the common experiences of TCKs and other cross-cultural children, there are millions of people all over the world for whom this is the

case. The idea that the only "normal" is growing up in one culture denies the alternative "normal" for millions who have not only survived their cross-cultural childhood, but thrived in adulthood.

There is a difference between having definite geographical roots in one place and belonging. As many migrants can testify, a return to the country, city or town of origin may take them back to their roots and there may be a great sense of loyalty to those roots, but it does not guarantee the feeling that they still belong there. Equally, after some time settling in a different place, there can be strong sense of being at home there. How long "some time" is will vary depending on all sorts of factors such as the strength of desire to integrate, how quickly local friendships are formed, a willingness to engage in local groups and the openness of those groups to outsiders, plus the level of determination to accept and grow to enjoy living there. There are some factors, such as unexpectedly arriving in a community that doesn't readily accept outsiders, which may be beyond a newcomer's control, but mostly developing a sense of belonging is influenced by coming in with the right attitudes.

Having roots and loyalties in different places and cultures while growing up does not mean that belonging somewhere different as an adult is impossible. It may make it more difficult to develop a sense of belonging, but recognising that challenge is a helpful first step in overcoming it. There can be a temptation to simply move on as a result of the behaviour pattern that is entrenched from the growing-up years. However, moving on out of necessity is one thing, whereas moving because of an inability to settle anywhere is a different matter, and unhealthy as a long-term pattern. It can also be liberating for an adult TCK to know that a sense of belonging in a different place does not constitute disloyalty to their childhood. Here again, TCKs share experiences that are very similar to those of the wider group of cross-cultural kids such as migrants and those from cross-cultural marriages.

Restlessness and Living for the Moment

Lovers of 1960s retro music will recognise the lines from the song "Distant Drums" (Lyrics by Cindy Walker, 1963):

> *Let's share all the time we can before it's too late,*
> *Love me now, for now is all the time there may be*

The context of the song is different, but it describes how many TCKs feel: 'make the most of now because we don't know how long there may be together.' The friendship may deepen quickly, but it may not last. Or the adult TCK may grow to fear making close friendships, due to the potential pain when it comes to moving on – yet again. These feelings arise from a mobile childhood with its lack of permanence while growing up. If the deep and meaningful relationships to people and places in the past always came to an end in the past, the fear is that will always happen in the future. This can result in a short-term mindset that struggles with the whole idea of living for a prolonged period anywhere and settling in. Growing up with a move every few years can mean that consciously or sub-consciously an end-point is expected soon, so much so that the fear of not having that end-point triggers another move. Moving to a new home or job is one thing, but moving on from relationships simply because

close friends were left behind (or left you behind) is often much more problematic. In the worst cases there can be unstable marriages because of this.

However, it does not have to be like this. Self-understanding and knowing where the restless urge to move and change comes from can be a real breakthrough. It helps to minimise the risk of becoming a victim of the past, where a child might have had little or no choice about the next move planned by the adults in his/her life. The adult TCK can move when needed, but may also choose to stay if he or she wants to; something that can be empowering and liberating. There may also be other fruitful ways to channel restlessness, in commitment to a cause or through travel from a more permanent base. One adult TCK that we know is not in a position to move home at the moment but has recently visited his other childhood home, and plans to do so regularly and combine it with helping on development work there. Nowadays when a TCK moves on, the opportunities to keep in touch have multiplied and become much more immediate, compared with even just 10-15 years ago. This can help soften the impact of the good-byes when they inevitably come.

People-centred Cultures

For those who have experienced more people-centred or "warm-climate" cultures as well as individualistic "cold-climate" ones, there is usually a lasting impact. In a colder culture, there may be unease with the relentless desire for efficiency, while in a warmer culture there is frustration with the time taken to achieve anything. However there is familiarity and understanding of both ways of operating. Growing up in people-centred cultures means that the person appreciates the value of relationships better; people matter, and they are not just "resources" to achieve a goal. This is such an important ability, even in task-centred cultures where so many people are alienated from employers and other leaders who say the right things about how much people matter, but in reality pursue an efficiency and cost-cutting approach that uses people. TCKs have the capacity to be different because of the way that their upbringing has equipped them.

In cross-cultural situations the TCK can bridge the gap between the cultures by explaining why getting to know people before doing business is important. In Senegal, where we worked for some years, the approach was like this: "Il faut au moins dire bonjour" (at least say hello) before asking for something. Launching straight into a business discussion is a poor approach because relationships matter – a TCK who has grown up in Senegal or any other similar culture can appreciate and explain that. Likewise there are some Asian cultures which have multiple ways of saying "yes", most of which really mean "no". Not understanding this as an outsider will lead to frustration and disappointment all round, but the TCK who has experienced this growing up and understands what is being said, is again well placed to be a cultural bridge. Taking time to build relationships is not wasted in the long run even in business deals with a deadline to work to: good relationships help to make things happen in people-centred cultures.

Cross-cultural Economics

Where TCKs grow up and integrate to some extent in countries that are poorer than the passport country they are forced to live in two economic worlds. The greater the

TCKs' engagement in the poor country, the greater the impact it has – both negative and positive.

The negative side includes the struggle to be a wealthy foreigner surrounded by the poor. Inevitably this places barriers – different expectations, different lifestyles, and the risk of uneven friendships affected by the gains that could be made, or the risk of dependency. There can also be a sense of guilt because of greater wealth with its higher standard of living and future prospects compared to host country peers.
On the positive side though there can be a lifelong benefit of appreciating the value of money whilst not being caught up in consumerism. When this childhood experience is combined with Christian faith and teaching they frequently become generous givers of money and time: a large proportion commit themselves to mission and other mercy ministries to do something practical about poverty in a lost and broken world. This generosity of character linked with their cross-cultural skills has proven to be a good combination for many where growing up as a TCK has helped better equip them for such work.

Adaptability and Bridge Building

One of the great advantages for many TCKs of growing up cross-culturally is that of adaptability. Having grown up with different cultures and learned how to live in them, the idea and process of adapting to another new one is normally less daunting than for someone who has only grown up in one dominant culture. This adaptability is not limited simply to the childhood cultures or very similar ones, because part of the skill set is how to learn a new culture. There are numerous examples of this among TCKs that we know, some of whom grew up as Europeans in Africa but then worked (or work) as adults in an Asian country. Their cultural learning skills are transferrable and help enable successful transition.

A 'cultural superiority' mindset has been a huge hindrance to the work of many major multinational companies and organisations. It antagonises and grates with host country nationals who may well complain of the imposition of foreign agendas on them, even of neo-imperialism in former colonies. TCKs tend to more naturally recognise the value of different cultural perspectives and want to combine their strengths rather than impose one on the other. Their global thinking means that they have few personal issues with such cultural superiority. This makes them bridge rather than barrier builders.

However, growing up as a TCK alone is not enough to guarantee adaptability and global thinking. Just as important is the type of international experience. Some TCKs may have never really appreciated multiple cultures for a number of possible reasons. These reasons include, but are definitely not limited to, the following:

- In some cases there may have been so much mobility that the only stable factor was an international school education – there was never really long enough to bond with the host country he or she was in at the time. In such cases there may even have been resentment of the new country, not so much because of specific struggles to adapt there, but because of the constant moving causing stress and fatigue. If there is moving stress of this type now, hard decisions may need to be taken by parents to allow greater stability –

- that could include refusal of a promotion or transfer request in the interests of the children's long-term welfare.
- In others the expatriate group the TCK is in is aloof from, even dismissive of, the host country. Such attitudes can be part of the international school sub-culture which focuses on the wealthy elite. Parents and school leadership teams need to be aware of the prevalence of such attitudes and work actively to counter them; otherwise long-term damaging attitudes can be formed.
- Unsuccessful re-entry is also a hindrance to adaptation in a new place. "Leave well, enter well" is an important element in transition teaching and has its negative equivalent of "leave badly, enter badly". If someone is keen to work overseas mainly to escape from a passport country where they feel that they do not belong, then the chances of transition success are poor – a true sense of belonging somewhere different will probably be elusive.

For most TCKs though the positive factors of adaptability and bridge building skills make them an attractive choice for many international companies and organisations. They are keen to recruit TCKs and others with previous cross-cultural experience. These TCKs are also often articulate and well-educated, giving them huge potential to benefit the organisation and those they work with.

Among the TCKs that we know, there are great examples of this.
One person helped staff in a joint European/American company to function more effectively together because of inside knowledge of both cultures whilst growing up. The company became more productive and profitable with a reduction in cultural misunderstanding.
Another worked on an effective medical project in a sub-Saharan African country where so many other projects have failed because of a lack of cultural awareness. Such failure results in huge amounts of aid money being wasted and fuels the black market; well-meaning, but naive efforts achieve very little to relieve the suffering of those in extreme poverty. Growing up in another African country gave this worker a head start on some of the insights needed to make this project work.

For those international organisations that have not yet recognised the potential of adult TCKs, it would be good to raise awareness of an untapped resource of knowledge and skills. Those resources can be hidden because adult TCKs are not an obviously recognisable group. However, the cross-cultural skills, empathy and flexibility already in place can help overcome many of the problems that might be experienced in an overseas assignment.