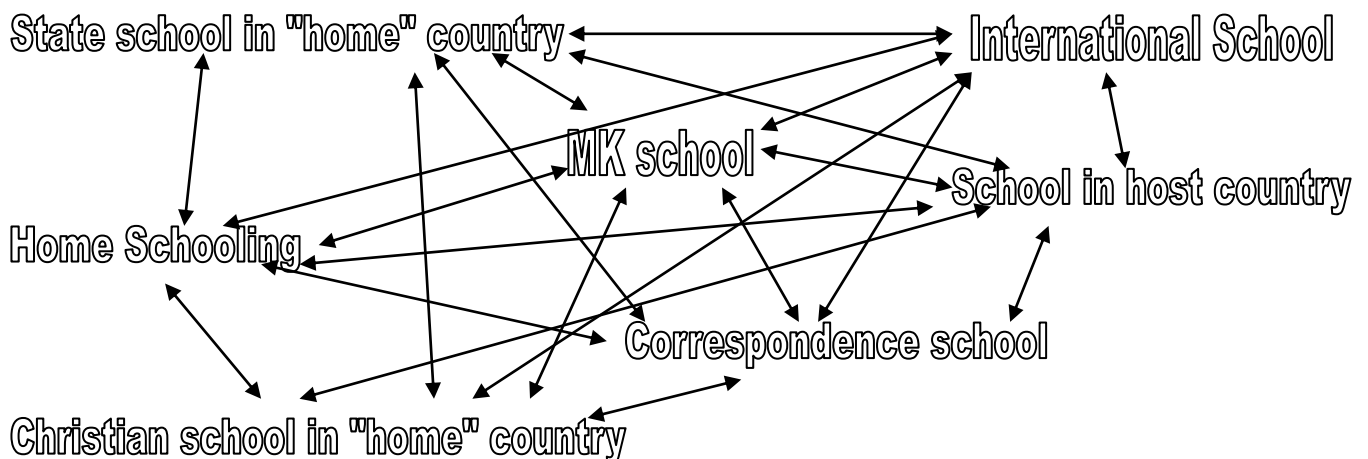


Changing Times

The world of the Third Culture Child is one of constant change. The end of the 2002/2003 academic year for the MK and international schools in the Northern Hemisphere will only serve to underline that. For many children this end to the school year will be the end of a chapter in their lives and the next one could well open somewhere on the other side of the world. This could be because of a change of ministry for their parents, a shift from home schooling to boarding school – or vice-versa, or it could be the end of the overseas assignment with the need to face the re-entry process. Whatever the reasons, one of the biggest adjustments our children have to make comes with the start of the new academic year and a shift to a new form of education. This article will focus on the academic changes that the children will face. However, this adjustment must be multi-faceted. Some individual changes may not seem too overpowering in themselves, but they are considerable when all of them must be faced at once: consider the following

- **Social** – new friendships have to be made and a new school or academic culture has to be learned with different ways of doing even simple things. Breaks between lessons may be longer, shorter, more or less frequent; teachers may be addressed more or less formally or the child may need to adapt to being taught by the parents; behaviour control through rules may be more or less rigid; the interaction among the children/students may be completely different. This school culture may be so different that the child experiences culture shock when faced with it.
- **Spiritual** – many of our children are in Christian schools, either MK schools or international ones with a strong Christian influence. In home education the parents can ensure that the children receive Christian input and spiritual teaching that they are happy with. This changes if our children are transferred out of this type of system and into state, secular international or private schools. This need not be entirely negative. It may be that brushing shoulders with children who don't share their Christian beliefs is the kind of stimulus and challenge that they need to stretch their faith and make them ask the questions that they need to ask (and maybe even find some answers). However, there can be a huge shock involved in the transfer from a small and secure environment, where most or all of their peers think the same way, to a new one where the prevailing values are of secular humanism and postmodernism, and where basic moral values are broken or ignored.
- **Physical** – the freedom of home schooling with its self-directed learning may be replaced by the 'crowd control' of a large school. Sometimes those crowds can seem, or even be, intimidating. The small classrooms and space to move in the small MK school may be substituted for the crowded classrooms with 30+ students of typical state schools. Airless centrally heated classrooms may replace bright warm ones.
- **Academic** – there are many possible forms that this can take:



A suitably confusing diagram? It's meant to be! In fact the reality is often more complex than this, and I'm not just referring to the odd arrow that may have been missed out; different children in the same family may be pursuing different options at the same time. No doubt someone could come up with another educational solution that they have used, although more often than not these are combinations of those in the diagram or they are variations on a theme such as Internet schooling.

One of the biggest questions that we need to answer when faced with a change of system is how well the two systems match up. Can a child make a successful move from home education to an international school, or from a small MK school to a large state secondary in the passport country? What can we do to allow that changeover take place as smoothly as possible? Here are just a few points to consider when faced with these changes; they are not exhaustive and are not meant to be, rather they are highlighted to provoke thought (and hopefully a reaction). We will be inviting comments and personal stories of how our children faced these changes, so if you have personal experiences that you would like to write about – good or bad – please let us know and we'll include them in a future Educare.

1. How well do the two systems match up? This is not a straightforward question to answer. For example, across Europe there is a principle of equivalence in operation. In other words a French school should recognise that a child who has successfully completed his education up to the age of 12 in a Spanish school should be at the same level as his French peers and should be able to go into the correct year group. In theory this sort of arrangement should work across Europe and European systems (e.g. French/British/German etc. international schools). In reality though the level of the new language is critical. It is unrealistic to expect a child simply to fit in to the new system without the necessary level of language competence. The older a child is, the more difficult this becomes as they probably do not have the technical and academic vocabulary needed unless they have been deliberately taught it. It may be necessary to contemplate a language learning period of a year or more to make up the difference. This isn't all bad news, as the child will have a very good level of fluency in another language already. E.g. a Brazilian child who transfers from a French to a Brazilian school may need a year to reach an adequate standard of Brazilian Portuguese to continue, BUT the French will be of a standard that would be very difficult to attain even from prolonged study in Brazil.

For our children returning from international and MK schools there are many factors involved, such as the standard of teaching in the schools, the expected attainment levels, the nationality of the child and of course the language issue. Where the school is based on British or other European systems, the academic level should be acceptable for a transfer to another school or educational system – assuming that the school is doing its job properly. For European schools this is the equivalence principle again. In North American systems students transferring in from European style education don't tend to come across many academic problems and across Commonwealth countries it is also widely accepted. However, most of the international schools and many of the home-education and internet systems run to an American curriculum. How well can children transfer from this into European or Commonwealth ones? There is no one correct answer to this question, but generally speaking if a child is transferred at the elementary/primary level then the change is easier. This is partly because the systems are more compatible at this stage and partly because the child has not had many years of education in a "foreign" system. They have not learned large amounts of academic vocabulary or experienced the divergence of the systems at senior level. They will also have longer to get used to the new situation.

For the child making a change at senior level the picture is more difficult. European and Commonwealth countries have externally controlled academic levels that their students are expected to achieve at the end and at different stages of their education. The ones at the end of the process such as Abitur, Baccalaureat, Matura, A level, New Zealand Certificate etc. determine university entrance and the universities treat them on the equivalence principle. For non-anglophones there is also the vital question of the level of the mother tongue. Universities will also require that this be up to the appropriate level for higher education. This may require a "repeat" year to allow time to attain this level, although it is also important to have mother tongue study alongside the rest of the schooling before the change. Some schools may even be willing to accommodate this and allow slots out of the normal timetable, so that the mother tongue study is less of a burden. If you have control of the programme through home-education or part control through internet/correspondence then build this in as an integral part of the curriculum.

The academic level of international schools varies. Students coming from American systems who apply to most European and Commonwealth universities will need to have SAT 2 and Advanced Placement (AP) qualifications. Depending on the desired programme of study and the university the Advanced Placement subjects may well be specified. Unfortunately many of the international schools are relatively small and are not able to offer the SAT 2 and AP courses because of the lack of students and the demands on a small staff body. Their end qualifications are the SAT 1 and the high school graduation diploma, which are often viewed as the equivalent of the level attained at the age of 16 in European and Commonwealth countries. This means that the qualifications on offer in the international schools (or from some of the correspondence and home-ed. systems) will not be adequate to gain entrance into university. Given that many of our children are capable of studying at university, this raises some serious issues. What are the options?

- Accept the mismatch and allocate between one and three more years to gain the necessary qualifications on returning to the passport country
- Accept the mismatch and find an alternative training route that does not involve higher education
- Transfer the child early enough to another school or home-ed. programme that can deliver the qualifications
- Go to the USA for higher education

All of these possibilities have been used, although not without cost to the students and their families. If your children are in one of these systems, it is vital that you know what qualifications are on offer and that you plan accordingly. This would avoid the shock of applying for a university place only to be turned down and faced with 2 or more school years to get there.

Whatever the original system it is vital to plan ahead in order to avoid shocks when the change is made. It can also ensure that change is not delayed and left too late.



2. The timing of any change can be critical. If it involves a change in language then it should take place no later than at the age of 12 or 13. If this is not possible it may be better to go through to the end of the current system and then make the changes. Arriving back with a Baccalaureat or APs would allow for university entrance and would leave “just” the problem of the language to face. For anglophones in international schools that offer AP and SAT 2 qualifications then it may also be the best option to work towards them rather than changing mid-stream. A significant question though could be the needs of the younger siblings. A change made for the benefit of the eldest child could have adverse effects on the younger ones; choices have to be made bearing all of the children in mind.



3. A big part of planning for change is to ensure that there are complete records of the child’s achievements to pass on to any new school. With a change to home education this should be easy, but where a child changes from one school to another, the records will need to be thorough and will often need to be interpreted. Where there is a shift of language, they will need to be translated and fully explained; even with the same language a full explanation of what the records mean could be necessary. At BCS we learned to include an explanation of what our grade levels meant, so that receiving schools could make sense of the child’s report sheets. Beware

of assuming that the new school will automatically understand school reports, even if they are in the same language. It is safer to assume that they won't. A record should also include representative samples of the child's work and a record of what areas have been studied and to what level, plus test results and sample test questions. Extra-curricular achievements such as sport or music awards and other club membership should be in there too, along with some kind of age-appropriate personal statement from the child. Even if the new school chooses not to use all of this information straight away, it is best to give in case they need to refer to it at a later date if any questions arise.

Prepare!

4. Ensure that your children and the receiving schools are prepared as soon as you are aware that changes are to be made. Forewarned is forearmed! If you turn up and expect a school at the last minute to take on a child whose school records are in a foreign language and even when translated remain meaningless, you will cause problems. You will needlessly add to the child's existing sense of disorientation and the school may well become awkward and uncooperative. Your child's previous efforts to gain good grades in the system they have come from may go unheeded because the new school has been faced with a problem that it could do without. The remedy? – Get in touch with them as soon as possible, so that they understand who is coming, why they are coming and so that they can prepare themselves to receive the child.
5. Be aware of possible impossibilities. During the Second World War, the Allies came up with a bold plan to speed up driving the Nazis out of the Netherlands. This involved paratroopers capturing a series of bridges and preparing the way for the infantry to advance. The move was successful, except for the last bridge at Arnhem which the infantry failed to reach on time and the paratroopers were forced to escape or surrender having taken heavy casualties. Arnhem became known as the "bridge too far" Our plans may be bold and our vision for our children may be great but some changes may represent "a bridge too far" for your child. Don't expect a child to adjust to a new system at the age of 14, with a change of language, culture, style of learning and without the necessary preparation in the earlier school years without considerable support. Sounds obvious? It certainly does, yet this is what some parents continue to expect. Think and pray through all of the implications of the change and have reasonable expectations; be realistic about the possibility of success.

Realise that there are possible impossibilities

We would love to hear your responses to this, especially personal stories of your children facing educational change. Please e-mail them to us on SteveGill@mkea.freeseerve.co.uk

New Resources Ready

1. The New MK Manual by Jean Barnicoat (our predecessor in this job) is about to go to print. This has faced a number of delays on its way, but should be ready in the next two months. If you are not going to receive a copy and would like to, please let us know as soon as possible. Cost – approx. £2 (2 GBP or 3 Euros/US dollars)

2. Pre-field Orientation for Children – this is now complete and available on 4 floppy disks at cost price to Christian organisations. If you know of international and commercial companies who express an interest, please refer them to us, and we will make an arrangement with them.

The material in this scheme is mostly new. Good practice and ideas that have already been used are incorporated, but the majority of it is a compilation of recent ideas from a number of people, including us. The idea behind the scheme is to provide a bank of work cards; teacher resources and inspiration so that organisations and families can create a relevant programme for children that will help prepare them for the changes ahead. Let us know if you are interested.

Responses to previous editions

“I have read the Educare with interest. If you wish I would be happy to display posters at SMC advertising overseas opportunities to teach. Let me have anything you wish to distribute and I will ensure that at least one teacher training college is advertising for teachers!!”

(Mark Whitfield of St. Martin’s College in Carlisle)

-Thanks for the double encouragement of advertising our needs and the interest in Educare!

Moira Smith, based in Singapore, who co-ordinates OMF home-school support from wrote to us

“Thanks very much for Educare. On the mentoring issue I agree wholeheartedly with what you have said. While families often need (and want) guidance in their home schooling or education choices in general, it means a whole lot more when it comes from someone with whom they have some kind of relationship. Each of our fields has a TCK co-ordinator whose job is to build that kind of supportive relationship with families, helping to guide them through the minefields of education choices. These co-ordinators are not necessarily educators, but they have access to a network of people (including myself) at home and on the field, who can give advice and support. Co-ordinators are serving as full time missionaries but have the TCK support work as part of their ministry. One of the challenges is the number of nationalities among our members - I know you have the same situation in WEC.

I also appreciated the article about teacher recruitment, as this is also high on my agenda. I'm particularly interested in seeing short-termers come to support home school families for anything from a month onwards. This year I have had a couple of retirees from the UK come to work with home school families and I hope that this will be an area of growth.”



And last, but not least, WELL DONE BCS on reaching the first anniversary on what we hope will be a permanent site for many years to come at Kiniabour. It’s a major milestone for them, after the evacuation in 1997 and the years of uncertainty on the temporary site at Keur Massar. We praise God for all His provision of funds and volunteer staff to help build it, and pray on for the futures of BCS and VIS.