

Welcome to a new edition of this publication that was first produced in 1994 by Jean Barnicoat, our predecessor as the International MK Education Adviser to WEC. In this new format we aim to produce a series of articles on topical issues in the world of our third culture children. We also will welcome correspondence and hope to include letters highlighting good practice around the world as well as some of the pitfalls that have been encountered along the way. In this way we would like "Educare" to be a forum for discussion, rather than just another MK/TCK publication. It will be circulated to all interested members of WEC, but we would also like it to be available to a wider range of interested friends, churches and families of our workers as well as to personnel in other similar organisations.

We aim to focus on one or two issues in each edition, this first one being on the question of integration into the host culture and whether using local schools is the answer to ensure that it happens. This question was raised at our international conference in June 2002.

Integration into the Host Culture - What's the best way?

One of the standard problems faced by our children is the level of integration that they can have into the local culture. Our children are often attending international schools where they can very easily become isolated - except from the expatriate international scene. A typical accusation levelled against the specialist MK school is that it segregates the children away into a rarefied "bubble" that has little or nothing to do with the host culture. Without deliberate efforts to ensure that it doesn't happen, the problem can be the same for children learning at home - whatever the method used - correspondence, internet or another course selected by the parents. Faced with this isolation from the local culture and the resulting lack of bonding, some have suggested that attending the local school is a major part of the answer. What are the pros and cons of this idea?

The major benefit is that the children get an insider's view of the local culture and rub shoulders with their national peers. Normally speaking, this is a good way to acquire the local language. This acquisition does not just "happen", so the parents need to understand that it takes the children some time to reach a satisfactory level, and it could be necessary to repeat a school year. Generally speaking, the younger the child the better this works. A child of 6 or 7 stands a much better chance of learning the language and fitting in to the school scene than one of 12 or 13. The language that they have to learn is at a simpler level and they have not yet learned a large technical vocabulary in their mother tongue. Additionally, younger children tend to be more accepting and open to outsiders than teenagers, so the social integration should be better. There are other benefits.

- This is a cheaper option if the local state schools are used. However, if the standard of the state school education is low and a local private school * has to be used, this may not be the case.
- The standard of education on offer in some countries may actually be better than that of the passport country. We have some friends who worked for many years in France, before taking up a new assignment in the USA. All of their children went through some years of French education. All of them have performed well academically and were ahead of their peers when they "returned" to the USA. The standard of some of the local private schools can also be very good* - other friends who spent several years in Kenya were very happy with the education their children received in such a school. The children were bored on their "return" to the UK, feeling that they were not academically stretched.

*(A danger here though is that the private school may be too full of expatriates and so not really allow integration.)

- The parents are seen to be choosing to integrate as well. It is a significant vote of confidence in the host culture and its educational system. In developed countries, especially across the anglophone world, choosing to follow a correspondence or home education system from the passport country rather than using the local school can cause offence and be a barrier to ministry.
- The parents should now have the same time available and can follow the same type of daily schedule as their national friends.
- The nuclear family can be kept together.

These advantages have prompted some team leaders to make national school attendance a recommendation worth considering for at least some of the school years. These leaders have also seen how difficult it has been for children who have had segregated schooling to bond with the host culture. So why don't we all go down this road? Not surprisingly there are some formidable obstacles in many of the situations our families are in.



Two Sides to the Debate

When we talked about this issue at the 2002 conference, a number of team leaders were emphatic that this wouldn't work where they were. In some cases the religious influences, even in the very early school years, were such that the children were disturbed or otherwise adversely affected by the spiritual "input" that they were receiving. In cases where the non-Christian ethos and teaching of the school is very obvious it would be unwise to allow our children to be educated there. They can be made aware of these things as and when they are able to cope with them, but they should not be educated in such an environment that is so opposed to what we believe. Even if the children seem to settle in well, and make friends as well as academic progress, there can still be a problem. Any child absorbs values from school, the good and the bad. To some extent we can counter this from the home, but if the pressure is insidious and constant, reflecting values embedded in the society (such as being "economical" with the truth or work avoidance – or workaholism!) then it can be difficult to undo damage.

Others raised very legitimate concerns about the standard of education. We minister in some of the poorest countries in the world where teaching takes place lecture style to huge groups of children. If they understand and progress then it is despite the lack of resources, but inevitably the majority fall by the wayside somewhere along the educational path. We could not responsibly place our children into a class of over 100, all learning by rote repetition after the teacher.

If the society is open and friendly then it can work well, but consider this example

*My first year of school in Australia was horrible. I learned that Americans weren't very popular because of a nuclear base they'd set up near Sydney. People protested against the "ugly Americans" all the time. I felt that other students assigned me guilt by association just because I was a US citizen. Looking back, I realise the only kids who were good to me didn't fit in either. **

This boy eventually fitted in by becoming a chameleon – Australian on the outside, American on the inside - and by moving school. No one knew that he was an American in his new school. In other cases we have observed jealousy, and therefore hostility, if the child does well academically. Another boy talked about being continually reminded that he was an outsider – by both staff and some of his classmates, although he did make a good number of national friends.

* From "Third Culture Kids" by Pollock & Van Reken - a highly recommended book to read

Another huge concern is that of “re-entry” and further/higher education. How do children who have had a prolonged period of education in another country, and probably in another language, fit in? In some cases they may choose not to, by following through right to the end of their education in the host country, and possibly even deciding to live there themselves in the long term. In other cases there are good reciprocal agreements and it is possible to enter higher education with overseas qualifications. For example it is possible to enter a university in the UK by passing the French Baccalaureate as long as the level of English is good enough. Another possibility is to accept that there will be a period of a year or two to catch up on the level of the mother tongue on re-entry, but that the pay off is a very high level of fluency in another language. There have been families who have faced this situation realistically and positively because of the long-term benefit of being almost bilingual.

The possibility remains, though, that systems may be mismatched. Also, the struggle to fit back into the passport culture should not be underestimated. This is a huge area of concern for our non-anglophone families when their children are taught in English, but the same concerns can arise as a result of education in national schools. Are we ready for the possibility that our children will feel very ill at ease and unable to settle in the passport country on re-entry? Are we sensitive enough to change over the education system they are following if we see that it is necessary for their long-term re-entry prospects? These are questions that each family that opts for prolonged national education will need to answer. When considering whether the national schools would be suitable or not, there are other questions that parents need to consider.

- Does the school welcome the presence of foreign or expatriate children or would they be a burden in an already over-stretched system?
- Is the quality of education adequate? If the answer is yes, then for how long is it suitable to keep the child in it? If there is a problem, is it one of resources or style of teaching and class size?
- Is religion or philosophy taught in the school and if so how forcefully? Is it something that can be counteracted at home by good Christian teaching and discussion?
- Are the standards of health and sanitation good enough?
- How will this affect the pattern of home leave? Will the child be able to make a successful transfer into the passport country system for up to a year?



So what CAN we do?
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Clearly we do want our children to bond with the local culture. We want them to have local friends, a sense of loyalty to the country and their area in it and a sense of identification with the Christian community there. Attending a local school, either state run or not too exclusively private, may well be part of the answer in some cases – but not in every case. What else can we do to encourage this bonding? A few ideas to help are given.

1. Include the host language in the child’s curriculum. If the child is following a programme of home education, then a host language teacher could be hired. This person could also provide a useful bridge in to the local culture. The same could be done if the child’s “international” school does not

include the host language in the timetable. Specialist MK schools should have a strong programme of teaching the local language. If the school does not have such a policy and insists on teaching just what the children would learn in the passport country, it is well worth challenging this approach. Ted Ward said back in the 1980's that nothing grieved him more than seeing people [schoolchildren] learn a language that was not the national language while ignoring the national language. We agree. (One exception that we may have to make though is to temporarily shelve national language learning when a non-anglophone enters an English language system.) Communication with local people is vital, and the official teaching of the language should begin early in the child's school career. At BCS for example, we had French in the timetable even for very young children in the first primary class, and followed this through with a strong emphasis until the IGCSE examination. Many of our children there were ready to take this exam at least a year earlier than their passport country counterparts. As a result of this there were obvious benefits in terms of communication and confidence. The children were also encouraged to talk to the Senegalese ancillary staff at the school, not only to practise their French, but also to build bridges of friendship into the local community.

2. The school or home education programme should also build in elements of local studies. Include local history and geography in the programme of study. Why relentlessly study urban growth in the Third World from a textbook if it is right there on the doorstep? Also, it would be a strange educational philosophy to teach the history of a western country in enormous detail and yet leave our children almost totally ignorant of the host country's history. Include local music and drama forms in the expressive arts teaching. Local performers can be brought in to show the real thing. With imagination other areas of the curriculum can similarly benefit from use of local resources.
3. Social interaction can be encouraged, either through formal membership of clubs or more informally through play. As the children get older this is often much easier for the boys, as the local boys in many societies have much more time and freedom to engage in leisure activities such as football. The girls in such societies are often expected to work around the home and face many more social limitations. To some extent this is less marked in an urban environment, but the pressure is still there. Some home educating parents have deliberately set this type of social interaction up with success. It is important to find the balance between encouragement and pressure. Some children are naturally reserved and to push them, especially early on, into play and social situations where they will be exposed to boisterous and rough local children could be counter productive. Using another child as a mentor could be very useful.
4. Bring friendly local adults into the child's life. This allows the child to appreciate aspects of the host country in a non-threatening way.
5. Be positive yourselves about the host culture and give your children the role model of involvement wherever possible. Keep them away from jaded expatriates who have negative attitudes and comments – this includes expatriate children sometimes. If it is impossible to avoid such people, then explain to them that there is a problem and that you do not share these jaundiced views.
6. You as parents (or school staff) could accompany the children and take them on visits to local friends. This is helpful in new areas or where you are uncertain of any potential "mentors".

In conclusion, this article is not meant to be the definitive word on this issue. We would be delighted to hear from you – even if you disagree strongly with some of what has been written. We know that across WEC there are a lot of good ideas and good things going on to help integration. Write to us at the e-mail address given and let us know any thoughts that you have on this. Thanks in anticipation.

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If the e-mail is off for any reason the postal address is

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Resources available

A new book is on the market – “Fitted Pieces” – published in 2001

This is produced by SHARE Educational at a cost of US\$22.50 plus post & packaging.

This book focuses on the educational issues involved in taking our children overseas, although the first two or three chapters include more general information as well. It has 50 pages of information on the issue of national schools, with some very relevant articles included. Well worth reading. To order it e-mail SHARE at FittedPieces@share-ed-services.org

If you are home educating, a teacher called Kay Dyas is willing to offer a teaching package for primary children at a reasonable price. She would help create a curriculum, recommend resources to back it up, provide plans for use of the resources and oversee the assessment based on the child's performance. She is about to do this for friends heading for overseas service and would be happy to do the same for others. If you're interested let us know.

Do you want to understand the educational system of another country? The INCA web site could provide you with the answers that you need. INCA stands for International Review of Curriculum & Assessment Frameworks Archive, and is a gold mine of information on the systems of almost all of the world's developed countries. You may even find it beneficial to help you understand some of the changes taking place in your own passport country to help in re-entry preparation. The site address is www.inca.org.uk Don't be put off by the UK bit if you're not British, this is an international venture.

Calling all schools and home educators. We have a good number of library books available that have been donated by a family who did home-education and have now completed school. They are currently in the basement at Bulstrode. If you are interested in having any books like this, then let us know.

