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TCKs and the Issue of Nationality and Culture

Citizenship is a vital part of a TCKs' cultural identity. It is very important that the cross-cultural parents explore all the citizenship options and keep them open for their children. TCKs may consider that they are not of the same culture as their parents and may well want to make their own choices regarding citizenship later on. It may be that for certain nationalities the parents need to consider seriously going back to the passport country for the birth of the children, not just for medical reasons but to provide that choice of nationality for the children later should their national laws demand it.

Many TCKs are born overseas in the host countries. This can bring certain privileges in some cases where a child may be eligible for long-term residency as a result, but it is also essential to register the birth with the passport country's embassy or consulate there. This allows the children to retain the home country's nationality or to choose the nationality of the country of birth. In some cases the visa status of the parents could change and the organisation be refused the right to renew, but a child born in that country could be allowed to return independently as an adult.

The registration of the birth with the passport country authorities will ensure that there are no subsequent entry complications and also that the child is eligible for the privileges of being a citizen of that country. This includes medical care, education access, obtaining credit, getting a passport, driving license and other essential documents. It is normally an agency requirement to have separate passports for the children at a very early stage.
One major concern for workers from some countries is that of eligibility for higher education access. The regulations in some countries such as the UK if taken on first impressions make it look impossible for a student to be granted home status and continue beyond the age of 15 overseas. This is not the case. Currently in the UK, the regulations are clear that to qualify as a home student and to receive student

finance, a student must have been “ordinarily resident” in the UK or the European Economic Area (EEA) for the previous 3 years. ‘Ordinarily resident’ does not exclude the possibility of being placed overseas at the agency’s request as long as the normal place of residence is the UK or EEA. This means that parents and high school students can continue through to the end of school knowing that it is possible to study after that as UK home students. There are similar regulations in some other countries and states.

As well as privileges and rights there are clear responsibilities of citizenship in some countries. There are quite a few with compulsory military service ranging from several months to two years. It may be possible to postpone this service during periods of higher education overseas, but it is still required after return to the passport country. On the positive side this can help with bonding back into the passport culture as new recruits all start together in the same situation and have to form new friendship groups as a result. This same effect of starting in the same situation as everyone else is generally true of higher education as well. This is not true for school where a child has to try to break into existing, and sometimes exclusive, groups.

The supporting groups and church will be in the passport country as well as the extended family so it is essential that the TCK feels a high degree of bonding with that country and culture, even if he or she chooses to live in the host country later. Some students will choose to go through higher education in the host country after completing high school there. In these cases long-term residence and marriage in the host country become distinct possibilities. It is important to know what options there are to move between countries in which they may have roots. Many TCKs will want to explore those options by experience if they have the right to live and work in more than one country. Support may also be needed as the TCKs try to come to terms with their multinational upbringing, and how to explain that to others.

Family cross-cultural living

There are challenges to all families living cross-culturally, and bringing up children in another culture means that there are going to be elements that may be happily embraced and others that parents will definitely avoid accepting. Behind every action and practice in a culture is a set of underlying values. As Christians, in whatever culture we find ourselves, we have to assess everything according to the biblical values that God commands us to hold as His people. It is the values behind cultural practices, including our own, that we need to consider when deciding which elements of a new culture to accept in bringing up our children.

It will also be important, as we make certain choices about whether to adopt different cultural practices or not, to help our children to understand why we have made these choices. When faced with differences it is useful to think about a few questions

1. What underlying cultural assumptions are we making and which of my values are being challenged, if any?
2. What are the underlying cultural values from the host culture's perspective?
3. Which biblical values need to be considered rather than just cultural ones?
4. Is this something we can adopt, reject or make a compromise with in this situation?

A simple example from everyday life is that of bedtimes. In some passport countries the routine bedtime is often at around 7:30pm for younger children. The reasons given would be for them to get enough sleep for the night and allow the parents some evening time. In the host country local children stay up until 11pm or even later, as this is a cultural norm and allows them to socialise in the evening with the rest of the family. There are probably no objective practical and/or biblical reasons that make one pattern better than the other for children. A cross-cultural family may choose to retain the early bedtime, go with local practice or compromise in some way - the "best" solution will depend on the children and the overall family situation.

Another example of a potentially divisive issue is that of praise and criticism. For example, if a child gives his or her mother a slightly scruffy drawing what should the mother do? In Western culture now praise is viewed as essential to encourage the child's self-esteem and ongoing creativity. Therefore the norm would be to thank the child and let him or her explain the picture. However, in other cultures the mother may well criticise it and ask the child to improve the neatness and presentation. Here the perceived need is to push towards the best achievement; also it may be that praise is only rarely given, to prevent children from becoming proud. Generally in such cultures parents are very proud of their children when they achieve well, but won't normally say it to them. Neither culture has it all right or wrong, and a cross-cultural family is well placed to combine the best of both approaches and the values that are behind them

Learning cultures

One of the standard problems faced by our children is finding the appropriate level of integration into the local culture. Children of different ages interact in different ways with the surrounding environment. Babies are born with strong genetic characteristics, but they are also like sponges, indiscriminately absorbing their environment. Small children seem to pick up language and local customs with no effort, although parents often notice the loss of that language after a few months if the children are taken elsewhere.

For a young child, the parents may be happy for him or her to be as fully integrated as possible in the surrounding culture. This may be particularly the case if the child is living at home with his or her parents and there are still a number of years left before home leave. On the other hand, for a child preparing to go to an international school in the near future the emphasis has to change. He or she then needs to learn more cultural traits appropriate for that school, in order to make transition into the new environment smoother.

Our older children are often attending international schools where they can very easily become isolated from the host country, mostly relating within the expatriate international scene. A typical accusation levelled against international schools is that they segregate 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. Because of this isolation from the local culture and the resulting lack of bonding, there are those who believe that attending the local school is the best answer.

Clearly almost all of us want our children to bond with the local culture. We want them to have local friends, a sense of loyalty to the country and a good level of identification with the local community there. Attending a local school, either state run or not too exclusively private, may well be part of the answer for some families living in countries where foreign children are allowed to study in local schools. However, this is not appropriate in every case, as the problems faced while studying there may be insurmountable. So, what else can be done to encourage this bonding? A few ideas include the following:

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 TCK 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. Communication with local people is vital, and the official teaching of the language should begin early in the child’s school career.

At Bourofaye Christian School in Senegal for example, French is in the timetable even for very young children in the first primary class, and is followed through with a strong emphasis until the IGCSE examination. Many of the children there are ready to take this exam at least a year earlier than their passport country counterparts. As

a result of this there are obvious benefits in terms of communication and confidence. The children are also encouraged to talk with 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 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 the children almost totally ignorant of the host country's history. Include local forms of music and drama, and invite local performers to demonstrate these where appropriate. With imagination other areas of the curriculum can similarly benefit from the use of local resources.

3. Social interaction can be encouraged, either through formal membership of clubs or more informally through play. Some home educating parents have intentionally and successfully set up this type of social interaction. However, 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. Having another child as a mentor is very useful. As children grow older in segregated societies, mixing at clubs and through play is often much easier for the boys, as the local boys have more time and freedom to engage in leisure activities. Local girls face many more social limitations and are often expected to work around the home. To some extent this is less marked in an urban environment, but the pressure is still there. Another problem arises when national children are pushed to study long hours, leaving them little time to mix socially. When they do it will often be with friends from school.

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. It is important for parents to be positive about the host culture and to give children the role model of involvement wherever possible. Where possible it is worth avoiding jaded expatriates with their negative attitudes and comments – this includes expatriate children sometimes. If it is impossible to avoid such people, then parents need to explain to their children that there is a problem and that they do not share these negative views. Part of that positivity involves appreciating local food, leisure activities and music. Using local transport, shopping in the neighbourhood, routinely buying national rather than imported produce, and wearing local clothing as appropriate all help to develop bonds with the host country and its people.

6. Parents 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”.

A final consideration about integration - the wider the gap between host and passport cultures, the greater the potential for culture shock as the TCK re-enters. So for a teenager, or any child, preparing to go on home leave or to return permanently to the parents’ culture work, must be done to prepare the child for the period of transition. In all of these situations there is no call for an ‘all or nothing’ approach. At all ages the TCKs must be able to appreciate and learn about the host culture, but at the same time consideration must be given as to how much, and at what stage, they are taught about their parents’ home culture to help facilitate the "re"-entry process.

Jean Barnicoat, edited by Steve and Gill Bryant

Further perspectives on the English and Welsh National Curriculum

A little while ago I wrote a piece for Educare about the National Curriculum changes in the UK. At the time of writing the new tests for 7 and 11 year olds had not been released, but the first contingent of children has now sat them, so I am writing an update.

I am writing from the perspectives both of a parent and a parent governor at my children’s school. The new tests have caused widespread concern, which even featured prominently in the British press. The year 6 test (age 10 to 11) is statutory, while the year 2 test (age 6 to 7) test for 7 year olds is not an external test, and the main assessment is still done by teachers on an ongoing basis.

The main concerns are the level required to pass, and the content of both tests. The new curriculum has a higher expectation at every level, so, for example, the standard previously required of year 3 is now expected in year 2. The general feeling is that the expected levels are too high. There has been enormous pressure on the year 6 children to reach the new level: I was hoping that my daughter in year 6 would not spend all her time preparing for the tests, but the reverse was true. The class spent a lot of time reviewing the new content of the test, and practising for it.

The other concern is the content of the test, especially the English test. It is very heavy on SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar), and there is also a requirement for neat joined up hand writing. There are no marks for imagination, content or creativity. In addition a child who uses unusual and interesting vocabulary,

but spells it wrong, loses marks for poor spelling so it encourages children to use only 'safe' vocabulary that they know how to spell.

The grammar requirements have caused a lot of comment. Much of the grammar taught seems to be quite difficult and many adults have had trouble completing the sample tests. Some terminology seems to have been invented or Americanised for the new curriculum ('fronted adverbial clauses', 'past progressive' verbs and so on).

While I appreciate that grammar is now taught well in schools (as a product of the free thinking 1970s style education, I know it hasn't always been), I find it sad that the creativity and imagination of children is drowned under such a heavy emphasis on grammar.

One of the saddest things is the implications for children with special needs. Any child with dyslexia or dyspraxia will be heavily penalised by the test's requirements to be neat and the emphasis on spelling. Schools are expected to get ALL children to the required level regardless of special needs. The expectation from the government seems to be that as children with special needs have received extra funding all through school, they should now be able to achieve the same level as their peers. This is regardless of their needs or ability.

Children with English as an Additional Language are also expected to reach the required levels, unless they have arrived in the UK since the 1st September of their year 5. Then they are exempt.

The intention behind the new curriculum was to hand education back to schools and parents and raise standards. The net result though seems to be making the school system more like an exam factory, and less like a place to educate the whole child.

Rebecca de Vos

What do the first test results indicate?

For the tests aimed at 11 year olds the results so far indicate the greater demands given the fact that only 53% of children passed Maths and English tests sat earlier this year.

Department for Education statistics show:

- *66% of pupils met the standard in reading*
- *70% in maths*
- *72% in grammar, punctuation and spelling*
- *74% in the teacher-assessed writing*

The overall figure of 53% relates to the number of pupils who reached the expected standard in all three subjects.

In response to this the current Education Minister, Nicky Morgan, explained that comparisons with the previous year's results under an easier curriculum and assessment system were meaningless.

In her words *"The tests have been made tougher and the curriculum has changed."* and *"They simply cannot be compared directly,"* She also said that it was *"more honest to accept a dip when the bar was raised, rather than sit back and watch numbers climb like an ever-upward tick."*

Quoted in http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-36712029

The education think tank Centre Forum is predicting a fall of up to 23% in good GCSE passes because of the new system.

Along with Nicky Morgan, other defenders are adamant about the need to raise standards and point to unfavourable international comparisons, based on PISA test results, which consistently give high rankings to East Asian education systems. The model of these countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and some major Chinese cities, is being promoted as one to learn from and use in the UK. The same defenders argue that some of the previous tests had become too easy and therefore they lacked value and did not prepare students for the next stage in education.

Although the new curriculum and tests have their defenders, it would be fair to say that they are significantly outnumbered by critics both in the teaching profession and among parents.

Reference: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/new-content-and-structure-changes-to-gcse-exams-in-2017-a6876841.html

Steve Bryant