

Chapter #9

EDUCATING THIRD CULTURE KIDS AND CROSS CULTURE KIDS: STUDENTS WITH HIDDEN AND APPARENT DIVERSITY

Patricia A. Stokke

Edd, MA, BS, West Valley College, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the impact of cross-cultural experiences on the education of a growing student population; those who live mobile lives. These students move across countries for their parents' careers or as immigrants or travel daily across cities or national borders to attend school. A transitory lifestyle means they must adapt to unfamiliar educational environments (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2018), which may cause challenges in their sense of belonging and interruptions in academic progression. Consequently, educators have a responsibility to understand the complexity and interrelatedness of learning, education, and culture (Hofstede, 2001) and adapt accordingly to support student success. The challenges facing this student population, including the needs and strengths emerging from their unique cross-cultural and mobile experiences will also be discussed, as well as methods of adapting teaching schemas. Additionally, potential areas of research are recommended. Teaching and serving students of hidden and apparent diversity is based on research in the fields of CCKs and TCKs, global transitions, cultural competence, cross-cultural and international education.

Keywords: neuroscience, hidden diversity, cross cultural and international education, cross culture and third culture kids.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to help educators better understand, serve, and educate students with hidden and mobile cross-cultural experiences. The challenges, weaknesses, and strengths that emerge out of the unique cross-cultural and mobile growing up experiences of this student population are discussed, as well as methods of adapting teaching schemas. A further goal of this chapter is to elucidate the need for further research and practical applications that support educational adaptations to meet the needs of culturally mobile students.

2. BACKGROUND

If every “experience has a formative effect on the constitution of the human being” (END, 2023), and we are to accept that education is one of those experiences, it is necessary to recognize and address the influence of cultural experiences on student educational outcomes. In the context of increasingly mobile societies, there is a need to consider how education can develop new pedagogies to better serve students living and moving between cultures. Although culturally relevant pedagogy is available (Ladson-Billings, 1995), there is little research on the cultural influence of high mobility.

Individuals referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) have similar challenges to students of other cross-cultural life experiences, such as those from less dominant cultures living in their passport country or children of immigrants, referred to as Cross Culture Kids (CCKs). “A TCK is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture...” (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2017, p. 15). TCKs and CCKs make up a growing population of students. Individuals can experience mobile lives as students for a variety of reasons, including globally because of parents’ transnational careers (Tan, Wang, & Cottrell, 2021), immigration, traveling daily across borders or cities, or as part of international classrooms (De Leersnyder, Gundemir, & Agirdag, 2022). As a result of their experiences, these students may have challenges with a sense of belonging and academic progression. Just as Lijadi and van Schalkwyk (2018, p.50) posit that “...one of the significant adaptations needed by children of high mobility families when moving to a new country is adjustment to the education system”, there is also a need for adaptations by students who transition between cultures for reasons other than moving to a new country.

Consequently, educators have a responsibility to understand the complexity of these particular cross-cultural experiences and their potential impact on educational success. This means that educators must become aware of and acknowledge these diverse life experiences that influence their students’ ability to adapt and learn. Since worldview emerges from one’s own culture and life experiences, Bredella (2003) cautions that we have the tendency to serve that culture first. For educators this can create blinders to understanding and learning how to effectively approach diverse worldviews and schemas that are vital to supporting positive student outcomes. This chapter begins to address the question, how do educators and student service professionals teach and serve these students effectively?

3. OBJECTIVES

Through an analysis of journal articles, the aim is to present an overview of the population of students experiencing cultural transitions, the need for educators to take into consideration the impact of a transitory lifestyle on pedagogy and educational outcomes and discuss potential research. Specifically, this chapter:

- a. Defines hidden diversity, third culture kids, and cross culture kids.
- b. Identifies the needs and potential strengths of culturally diverse students.
- c. Explores constructive approaches to teaching and serving students of hidden diversity.

4. METHOD

This chapter is a qualitative review of relevant cross disciplinary literature. The literature chosen is related to the topics of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), Cross Culture Kids (CCKs), hidden diversity, intercultural relations, culturally relevant pedagogy, and inter/cross cultural and international education. The sources were selected based on their applicability to the subject and purpose of this chapter. Additionally, they were chosen based on:

- a. Publication patterns: Years, journals, dissertations, and authors.
- b. Research characteristics: Definitions of TCK and CCK samples, and sample characteristics.

c. Content analysis: Research topics and themes.

More specifically, sources were decided upon based on their relevance to culture in education, transitions in relation to the mobility of TCKs and CCKs, neuroscience and culture. Dissertations were included due to the limited number of peer reviewed journal articles on TCKs and the impact of mobility on the education of TCKs and CCKs. Although the majority of the publications originated in English, there were a few that were translated into English. Dates of publication were also considered. More recent articles, within the last five to ten years, were selected. However, there were resources older than ten years that were included because of their relevant information. Articles were also chosen based on sample characteristics. For instance, only those articles with research populations that fit the definitions of a TCK and CCK were selected.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Delineating Third Culture Kids and Cross Culture Kids

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are defined as individuals who live or have lived outside their parents' culture or home country during their formative years, with the expectation of returning to the parents' home country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). "They are often described as people who build relationships to all the cultures they have lived in, but not having a full ownership in any" (Tan et al., 2021, p.81). Additionally, their appearances and behaviors do not necessarily match the expectations of others. An example is a Caucasian student returning to a dominant White country and culture after living as an expatriate in an African or Asian country where she looked different from the people of the host country. While growing up in this "foreign culture" she may have absorbed multiple cultural identities and practices, but upon return to her "home" country she is expected to reintegrate as part of the dominant culture. For example, a White student returning to a White dominant home culture may look like she fits in the but does not feel or behave as expected by her peers in the home country. This may result in challenges with identity and belonging, resulting in identity confusion, unresolved grief, and loss (Sichel, 2018). Additionally, she may be overlooked and misunderstood by educators due to assumptions and expectations that she is familiar with the educational system (Yang-Handy, 2019), which may lead to marginalization. A student of color returning to a dominant White culture may not only be marginalized but also become the target of racism. This marginalization and racism that he did not experience as an expatriate can lead to confusion in his worth and identity. The experience of being overlooked with the addition of inequitable and discriminatory treatment from educators, can impact his academic performance.

Cross Culture Kids (CCKs), the umbrella term that encompasses traditional TCKs, consists of individuals from diverse cultural experiences. For example, students who travel across town from culturally diverse neighborhoods to campuses in monoculturally dominant areas of cities, or those who immigrated with parents to new countries, or are refugees. CCKs daily study in new cultures but return home to parents' cultures at the end of each day, meaning these students live between two cultural worlds while trying to fit into both. Other categories of CCKs may be from families of mixed race or color, multiple cultures, or both (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). These are all examples of multifaceted complex cultural experiences impacting student identity development and schema that in turn may affect student learning and are not necessarily apparent, thus hidden.

Hidden diversity as defined by Van Reken and Bethel is a “diversity of experience that shapes a person’s life and worldview but is not readily apparent on the outside, unlike the usual diversity markers such as race, ethnicity, nationality....” (Pollock, et al., 2017, p.78). Hidden diversity is used as a descriptor because such cultural identities often are unrecognized or unacknowledged by the individuals themselves or others. Their identities are ‘hidden’ because individuals “look” the way others expect them to look like, yet because of their life experiences have cross-cultural influences not readily apparent to others as elucidated in previous examples. These cross-cultural experiences may influence students’ ways of thinking about, approaching, and interacting with their environments, which can be different than for students, faculty, and staff from monocultural and culturally dominant backgrounds.

5.2. TCK and CCK Challenges and Strengths

Considering the neuroscience behind culture and education may give insight into why education can be challenging for students with multicultural and cross-cultural backgrounds. There is an increasing body of knowledge indicating a connection between the brain and culture (Hammond, 2015; Han & Humphreys, 2016; Park & Huang, 2010). If culture influences the way one thinks, then it would follow that culture influences how we learn. For example, Western culture typically approaches thinking and learning from a linear approach, whereas an Indigenous culture’s approach is cyclical, and an Eastern culture’s approach is from a holistic perspective (Briers, 2010). These differences can make it challenging for students to learn in an educational environment different from ones they are accustomed to. In support of this notion are the findings from an analysis of western teaching methodologies in an eastern context that this can result in “...a complex web of cultural conflicts and mismatches.” (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009, p.109).

Other influences of culture in education include the power dynamic between student and instructor. For example, power distance, how one perceives authority (Hofstede, 2001), may influence student relationships with authority figures and comfort levels for questioning and challenging their instructors. If instructors with an egalitarian teaching style are informal with students accustomed to hierarchal authority, their teaching style may be perceived as unprofessional. Conversely, if students are comfortable with an egalitarian approach to learning, an instructor with an approach that is not egalitarian may be perceived as too formal and rigid.

Interestingly, the strengths of TCKs can become challenges. One such potential strength of TCKs is their tendency to be cultural chameleons. The skills needed to survive in multiple changing environments such as adaptability and inquisitiveness may give them a sense of confidence and self-reliance (Pollock et al., 2017). However, the desire and ability to adapt to new circumstances developed during transitory experiences and out of the need to fit into new environments, may keep them from seeking help. This characteristic can also make it difficult for faculty and staff to recognize a TCK’s need for support.

Acknowledging that transitions between cultures can cause cognitive overload, due to continual adjustments, cultural switching, loss, and cultural shock, will aid faculty and staff in developing the empathy necessary to support TCKs and CCKs learning. Another aspect of transitioning between cultures and cultural switching that requires empathy is language. TCKs and CCKs may speak multiple languages. They may not speak their “mother tongue” as their first language or speak it with an accent leading to bullying by classmates and misidentification by educators as they transition between cultures and countries. Spelling can be a challenge, particularly for TCKs who have learned British and US English. For instance,

remembering when to use “s” versus “z” in words such as criticize can become a problem (Pollock, et. al., 2017).

Adult Third Culture Kids, adults who grew up as TCKs, show a passion for diversity, self-assurance, and diplomacy that contributes to their propensity for global mindset and global leadership (Stokke, 2013). These are strengths that educators can encourage TCKs to develop, and that could one day open career opportunities. Encouraging their potential to become “changers, communicators, creative solvers, and global citizens” (Stokke, 2013, p. 105), which are often developed through multiple transitory growing up experiences, may help TCKs further cultivate their potential for communicating and building bridges across differences.

5.3. Adapting to Teaching and Serving Students of Hidden Diversity

Culture has been compared to the air around us (Hofstede, 2009), we are so familiar with it and we accept it without thinking about it until something affects that air. Educators often are steeped in ‘what it means to educate’ based on their own culture, without understanding how their cultural references can impact their teaching and interactions with students. Nguyen, Terlouw, and Pilot (2006) called for “...educational approaches that take a society's cultural diversity into account...” (p.1) and to adapt pedagogy to improve cultural compatibility. As such, the first step to becoming a culturally responsive educator is to accept and understand oneself as a cultural being by reflecting on one’s own culture and cultural experiences (Chavez & Longerbeam, 2016; Hammond, 2015; Marshall, 2002). Gaining an understanding of the air they live in by identifying their cultural references before facing cultural conflicts, shapes reference points about instructional schemas for faculty and staff (Hammond, 2015, p. 56).

Faculty and staff can explore their cultural self by asking themselves reflective questions such as: Was I the first in my family to attend college? If not, who did? Who were the heroes and anti-heroes in my family? As a child, did I call adults by their first names? Related questions about education and school background will lead to discovery of beliefs and schemas about time, collective or individual studies, viewpoints about cultural groups, countries, or educational systems. Other reflective questions may include: What approach and schema do I teach from? How can I adapt my approach to students from culturally diverse educational backgrounds? Do I make assumptions about their identities? Do I notice and acknowledge my students’ cultural backgrounds?

Educators can explore their cultural selves using questions such as those mentioned above in personal reflection journals or discussions about cultural situations with colleagues in professional development workshops or other meetings. Discussion activities in workshops that explore cross-cultural critical incidents can be facilitated in a small group format or in a gamified fashion. One example of this is using a game of cultural competence called incluKit© from diversophy® (Simons, n.d.). The incluKit© game engages educators and staff in a nonthreatening manner and leads them to explore dealing with diverse cultures and critical incidents in educational settings. This type of game can provide a safe avenue for open conversations about culture that is vital to developing cultural awareness and competence.

It has been shown that students who experienced a multicultural approach in international classrooms had fewer cultural misunderstandings and more inclusive learning environments as compared to mono-national classrooms (De Leersnyder et al., 2022). When students perceived faculty as recognizing and valuing cultural diversity, they indicated that they were being taught in a psychologically safe and inclusive classroom. Conversely, students felt less safety and inclusion when they perceived that faculty was overlooking cultural differences.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

If “Our own culture is to us like the air we breathe and another culture is like water – and it takes special skills to be able to survive in both...” (Hofstede, 2009, p.18) and culture is not just in the material world, but also outside of us, within us, in our minds and thoughts (Simons & Amara, 2022) then educators need to acknowledge the strengths of students in cultural transitions and address the challenges of experiencing multiple cultures. It is important that educators first recognize the connection between culture and education, second understand their cultural selves and the impact on their teaching, and lastly adapt their teaching schemas to become culturally responsive educators. This helps enable educators to support the learning and development of the unique capabilities of TCKs and CCKs. To provide that effective support to culturally mobile students, more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the impact of mobility on teaching and learning. This would supplement the existing research on cultural influences on education and address the gap in teaching and learning of students with mobile growing up experiences.

Kwon (2019, p.113) posits that there is a “necessity of supporting the growing community of TCKs in maximizing the potential benefits of cross-cultural experiences while helping them navigate the potential challenges of identity, transition, and relocation.” This author concurs and suggests the need to broaden that support to all CCKs, including implementing strategies to encourage direction and confidence by building upon the strengths of TCKs and CCKs. Along with that support, educators must acknowledge and develop TCKs propensity for connecting across differences and leadership capabilities (Stokke, 2013), as well as leverage their cross-cultural experiences to develop intercultural competence and positive diversity beliefs (de Waal, Born, Brinkman & Frasch, 2020).

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P. A. Stokke

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Full name: Patricia Ann Stokke, EdD, MA, PHR

Institutional affiliation: West Valley College

Institutional address: 14000 Fruitvale Avenue, Saratoga, California, United States of America, 95070

Short biographical sketch: Dr. Patricia Stokke is Associate Faculty at West Valley College in Saratoga, California, USA, where she teaches business management courses. She holds an EdD in Educational Leadership and Management with a concentration in Human Resource Development from Drexel University, a MA in Management from John F. Kennedy University, and a BS in Organizational Behavior from the University of San Francisco. Her research, Adult Third Culture Kids: Potential global leaders with global mindset, focuses on the propensity of adults who spent growing up years outside their parents' culture for thinking and leading across cultures, led to her work on the education of Third Culture Kids and Cross Culture Kids, intercultural communication, and intercultural competency. She is certified to administer the icEdge Intercultural Communication assessment tool and Global Mindset Inventory and has her certification as a Professional in Human Resource Management. She also consults as a Talent Development Professional.