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Introduction

This edition stems from a recent visit to Brazil. Whilst there I met with various families and mission staff to talk through the issues they are facing. Many of them are similar to those faced by continental Europeans and Asians, especially Koreans, which means that some of the good ideas and practices established there can be useful to the emerging Brazilian mission movement. This is true of concerns such as teaching the mother tongue and retaining the Brazilian culture at home while still working to integrate with the host culture and international culture of the mission and any schools the children go to. One big challenge currently is the lack of any programme designed to help parents teach Portuguese and key elements of Brazilian history and geography at home. Like our Korean families isolated from Korean Saturday schools, our Brazilians are often on their own in this area and have to teach this as best possible using resources designed for schools in Brazil.

There is the added concern for many Brazilians about money, in that Brazil is a low wage, low cost economy compared to most Western countries. That means that seemingly generous allowances there often don't even cover the basics when our families travel overseas. As missions and MK schools we need to understand this and empathise with the position of our families faced with educational costs.

An article to explain the Brazilian education system to others is currently being reviewed and should appear in the June Educare.

New Developments

There are several exciting new developments for Brazilian missions and families

1. WEC Brazil has formed the Flechas (Arrows) MK department; the first of its kind
2. Flechas has produced an original Portuguese-language DVD and booklet resource to explain what TCKs are.
3. They are also working on translations and aim to produce more original material after that.
4. Educare is now available in Portuguese. Request this at SteveGill@mkea.freemove.co.uk or flechas.wecbrasil.mks@gmail.com

Loss of the Mother Tongue - a comment

This comment was sent in by someone responding to the last edition on teaching the mother tongue. Although the context is that of the wholesale loss of the linguistic identity of peoples in the Amazon rain forest, much of what it says is relevant to our families and their children on an individual scale. The loss of a TCK's mother tongue can lead to the same culture loss and take

away part of their identity. The risk of not having enough fluency in either the mother tongue or English can also affect our TCKs.

The indigenous peoples still live in danger of extinction. We're not necessarily talking about human extinction but about an equally severe extinction – the loss of an individual's mother tongue, history, culture and the right to be and think differently while living in the same territory as individuals from other culture groups.

According to Lévy-Atrass, the linguistic loss is a sign of ethnic identity decay and the decadence of a nation. As we observe this sign, we understand how desolating this scenario is. Michael Kraus affirms that 27% of the South American languages are no longer taught to the children. This means that as time passes by, an even greater number of indigenous children lose their power of communication. Aryon Rodrigues estimates that, before the conquest period, approximately 1,273 languages were spoken. That means we have lost 85% of our linguistic capacity in 500 years.

Luciana Storto calls our attention to the Brazilian State of Rondônia, where 65% of the languages are in severe danger of extinction because they are no longer learned by the children at school and because they have a small number of speaking people.

The extinction of languages is important because linguistic loss means complex culture loss, including knowledge transmission, artistic forms, oral traditions, and ontological and cosmological perspectives. In a transition process, when the mother tongues are no longer in use, we get what we call "a lost generation," a cultural vacuum that affects a whole generation. That is, in the process of linguistic loss and Portuguese language migration, the indigenous groups go through an adaptation process where they don't have enough fluency in either the mother tongue or Portuguese to have a deep conversation. This process lasts no less than three decades. This is a dangerous moment for individuals, when the indigenous identity is questioned, along with the indigenous values. Above all, the individual's power of communication is lost. Dreams are lost, too.

Interview with Mauricio & Elisabeth

Q Could you tell us how you became Christians and how you were first involved in mission?

Mauricio – I grew up in Sao Paulo and my Mum was a Christian, but Dad didn't really believe at that time. Mum died when I was quite young so my older brothers and sisters mostly brought me up. They took me to the local church Sunday school where I heard about mission work when I was just 5 years old and the mission worker led me to Jesus. It was an Italian Pentecostal church and they had many projects for mission and evangelism. When I was 16 I joined one of their teams and discovered a gift for mission, so I went off to Bible College to develop these gifts a few years later. I went to two separate colleges, one of them being MTC Latino Americano, so it took me 5 years in all to graduate. It was the WEC leader at the time, Bob Harvey, who told me about the MTC and WEC and as a result of this contact I joined up and went to Equatorial Guinea in 1994.

Elisabeth – I grew up in a Christian family in Belo Horizonte and from a very early age my Mum used to bring me to the WEC centre here to listen to the missionaries' stories. I received Jesus in my heart when I was 11 and got involved with the children's and teenagers' work. I went off to Bible College here in Belo and followed this up with a specialist linguistics course at the Wycliffe Centre. I was planning to go to Guinea Bissau, but met up with Mauricio and we got married in 2001 before going back to Equatorial Guinea together.

Q What were your roles in Equatorial Guinea?

We both worked at the Bata Bible College. Our team was very small, so we had to decide what we could do to make the biggest difference with so few people, so we opted for this training. When the college was opened in the 1990s it was small with only about a dozen students as the country was just emerging from years of dictatorship and mismanagement, but now there are about 50 on roll. Mauricio was teaching and administrating the School as Principal, and Elizabeth taught the New Testament and looked after the library.

Q I gather that both of your children had “interesting” introductions to the world!

Yes, definitely! Our daughter, Beatriz, was born in March 2003 in the Bata hospital in Equatorial Guinea. A new part of the hospital had just been built, but it hadn't been properly opened when Elizabeth arrived to give birth, which we hadn't realised. That meant that in the middle of the night we had to track down the Cuban doctor we knew who was staying in an unfamiliar part of the city to take us to the older hospital. Even when we had found him we needed to bump start the car. When we got to the hospital we found our way to the delivery room which wasn't prepared at all, but we were so grateful that nurses in our sending church had prepared a box full of all the resources we needed, from gloves to anaesthetic – even anaesthetic for surgery if needed. We were very thankful for our mission friends and church supporters at this time, and we praise God that Beatriz was born safely and that Elizabeth was able to return home with her later that day. Henrique was born in Brazil in October 2006 as we had returned by that stage. We are really grateful for the excellent monitoring and care we were given through the pregnancy and birth as Elizabeth is O- and Henrique O+. This gave rise to complications and he was born very jaundiced and needed prolonged hospitalisation and further treatment after that. He's fine now.

Q Beatriz was a very early speaker I understand.

She certainly was. She was already understanding and answering by 8 months!

Q What did you observe about her language development while there in Equatorial Guinea?

As the official language there is Spanish, she learned a lot of that and spoke Spanish with the children and any visitors to the home. Her first words were in Spanish, and for a while she spoke a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese. As the languages are close this mixing up is easy to do, but she did learn to separate them before she was 2. We returned to Brazil when she was just 21 months and at first she was puzzled by the fact that everyone spoke Portuguese, but she was fine with this after a couple of months. Since the return she has learned some English at school as well through mixing with English-speakers in the mission.

Q What do you think are some of the challenges of raising children cross-culturally?

For us, the first big one was re-entry. Beatriz had grown up with a lot of freedom to play and mix with others in Bata, and she had plenty of space around the house. Here in Brazil we live in Sao Paulo and have a small flat, so there was a real need to find her some space. It helped a lot to send her to school, as we found a very good private kindergarten run by people in our church. This was excellent for her as she loves to be with others and the small classes there gave her a very positive experience. We'd heard a lot of horror stories about re-entry, but didn't find it that difficult – this issue of needing to get her out to socialise was the biggest one for her and for us as parents.

The next step is uncertain for us and she knows that, but her biggest concern is that we go somewhere with a good school for her; she's gregarious and just wants to make new friends.

As parents we're not ready to teach her ourselves. There aren't any official home school materials from Brazil, we don't see ourselves as having the right gifts to teach her and would struggle with the teacher/parent role. We also feel that she really needs to mix with other children.

One other thing we've noted is that in all our moving we spent several weeks with our families and this can be unsettling all round. While Brazilians love to have the extended family to stay, it may not be the best or the easiest experience for all concerned when the family has just returned from another culture. The potential for a clash of values here is high.

Q What about the advantages?

Languages – Beatriz already has more than one and we expect Henrique to do the same.

Real experiences – growing up seeing the African places, people and animals was a great start, as it has led to an open mind to the world and to different ways of living.

Equatorial Guinea isn't a rich country, so we often had to do without things or wait, and this has had a positive effect in that Beatriz has learned to accept that she can't have everything she wants. Where we lived was secure and child-friendly and provided her with freedom to play and get a good start in life.

We also feel that it has helped us be a close and secure family.

Interview with a family working in Central Asia

Could you tell us a bit about where you come from and how you chose mission.

J (husband) – I'm from Recife in the NE of Brazil. I first heard properly about mission work in 1991 when someone working with the Amazon Indian tribes came to speak to our young people's Sunday school class. I was 19 at the time and when I heard the words from Isaiah 6v7&8 "Here I am, send me", I believed that I should go myself and that it would mean leaving Brazil. I spent 3 years in Bible College and I heard about WEC during that time. I joined in 1996 and prayed about where I should go. At that time a Dutch worker based in Brazil had just visited Central Asia and returned with a strong sense of the needs and opportunities there. I was particularly challenged by what she said about one of the countries there. At this time I also met Jo and we were married in 1999.

J (wife) – I come from Bagé in the Rio Grande do Sul in the far south close to the Uruguayan border. I first heard about mission when I was just 12 in a Sunday school class. Later, as a teenager, I really wanted to do mission myself and went to work in an AOG orphanage in Porto Alegre. I read God's Smuggler there and was challenged by the needs of Communist countries – so much so that I prayed that God would send people to them, but then I realised that He wanted me to go, not just pray for others. I went to Bible School in São Paulo for 4 years and wondered about Russia at first. After joining WEC though I heard about Central Asia and the challenges there.

What hurdles did you have to cross in order to get to Central Asia?

We had both studied at Bible College and were members of WEC, but it still took us another 8 years to get there! We spent 6 years travelling around Brazil, visiting many churches to raise awareness of the needs there. After this time we had about 20 different churches that were helping to support us. We then spent 18 months in Stockton in NE England learning English. We went there because a lady who had worked for many years with WEC Brazil had been sent out from a church that was willing to host us.

Why did you have to learn English?

We needed to communicate with all the others on our international team. We would be lost without it as well in the wider context of mission and the international community where the common language is English.

Did you have any problems adjusting to England?

Not really, we felt at home there and were well-received by the church people in Stockton. The only problem was the cold and damp weather! Another blessing for us while we were there was the birth of our daughter.

So when did you finally arrive in Central Asia, and how did you settle there?

We got there in 2003. It took us quite a long time to feel at home as we had no Russian or other local language and had to learn it there. Brazilians love to visit and receive visitors, and this didn't happen so naturally at first. We also found that friendship patterns were different – Brazilians make lots of friends and are really open and gregarious whereas it's much more family based in Central Asia. Living in a poor country like this is also a challenge. Although Brazilians don't have much money compared to other foreigners there, we still have more than most local people. This means that friendships can be uneven.

What did you do for your daughter's education while there?

She is gregarious and needs other children around her, so we sent her to a private kindergarten when she was 18 months old. This was a good one with just 12 children in the group and she went there for a year. After that she went to a state kindergarten. The groups there were much bigger, but she coped well and was beginning to learn sounds and symbols as preparation for basic literacy by the time we left.

You plan to return to Central Asia, what will you do then for her education?

We are considering different public and private kindergartens and they will have to be in Russian. The Brazilian education authorities more easily recognise school systems from countries where there is a Brazilian Embassy – since we have one in Russia, but not in our country, it's better for us to go with Russian schooling. She will start at full time school when she is 7. We will also teach her Portuguese ourselves. To do this we will need get the appropriate school books and make our own lesson plans as there is no home school programme that we know of. There is one school that provides materials for diplomats, but this is expensive and it relies on a fast postal system. Thankfully, I (mum) am a teacher and can make up my own lessons, but it would be difficult for us if I were not a teacher.

Are there any other options you would realistically consider?

There is a Christian international school in our country, but it isn't in our city. It's also expensive for us. Maybe when she is quite a bit older we would maybe consider boarding, but all of the boarding schools are thousands of kilometres away, meaning long and expensive flights as well as the separation.

Looking at your situation so far, how do you think that missions could improve things?

Better orientation would be a good start. As Brazil is beginning to send larger numbers of workers fairly quickly we need to be training our families about the need to teach Portuguese at home. We need teachers to help us know what resources to use. We also need to be made aware of the education systems in the countries we will work in. We had never imagined what schools in a low-income country would be like with their limited resources and very big classes.

If missions could work together with a school or schools in Brazil to produce an affordable home education programme to teach Portuguese that would be very useful too.

What about sending churches – what should they know?

Many churches are willing to help and pray enthusiastically for us. They also offer financial support, but Brazil isn't as rich as some other mission sending countries and most of our workers are under supported. In many countries the education of our children is a significant cost, so we would encourage Brazilian churches to think about this need as well when they send families out.

Could the Christian International and MK schools help at all?

Yes. Any help at all with learning Portuguese would be appreciated, even if it is as simple as giving some scheduled time to learn it in. If there were scholarships to help pay fees that would be very useful too given what we've said about Brazilians and the lower support levels. For us personally though we don't have a school like this in our city, these are just ideas that would help if we did have one.

We've talked a lot about the challenges, many of them extra ones not faced by English speakers, but what about the benefits?

We feel that the knowledge of different cultures like this is really positive. It has given her more flexibility already in her young life and she is used to adapting to different places. She's also got a good knowledge of a number of languages – Russian from the kindergarten, the local language from friends, Portuguese at home and English from others in the mission community.

Interview with Cristina Araujo Feb 2008

Q Where are you from?

I'm from Brazil and my husband Luis is from Venezuela, so we are used to hearing and using both Spanish and Portuguese in the home.

Q How many children do you have and when were they born?

We have one daughter called Talita who was born in August 2000. We lost a baby in the mid-1990s while we still in Brazil.

Q Could you tell us about how you and Luis came to go to Equatorial Guinea.

We joined WEC in 1994 and went on to Venezuela in 1995 for a year to work with Luis's church and for me to learn Spanish. We had thought of going to work in a Bible College in Uruguay at first, but that didn't work out for us, so we spent 2 years at WEC Brazil, before going to Doncaster in the UK to learn English and finally arriving in Equatorial Guinea in 1998. We went to Doncaster because there was someone we knew there who had set up a language school.

Q How have you managed teaching Talita two languages at home?

Most of the time we speak Spanish with her, Luis does all the time in fact although I tend to speak to her in Portuguese about some subjects. She has been in school in Equatorial Guinea for a while now, so her early education has been in Spanish. Initially we used a lot more Spanish with her as we felt that she needed the security of one language, but we recognise that she will need good Portuguese as we expect the long-term future for re-entry to be in Brazil. We returned from Equatorial Guinea for home leave a few months ago in mid-2007, spent some time in the USA en route before arriving in Brazil. Given this, we are happy with the way she has developed in her Portuguese since arriving here. We are also working to maintain her Spanish as we are due to return to Equatorial Guinea at the start of 2009.

Q How do you feel it has worked for Talita to shift between the school systems so far and how do you think it will work in the future?

We're happy with the way she has adapted this time on home leave and is progressing well learning in Portuguese.

One issue for us is that the academic year here begins in January, whereas in Equatorial Guinea it follows the Northern Hemisphere system from Spain. This leaves us with the decision as to when to make our move for home leave. Do we leave after the end of the school year in Equatorial Guinea? This would mean that we would need to put her into school here in Brazil in the middle of the academic year here, which means that it's uncertain which grade she should go into. She could go up by a few months which would mean more pressure on her and extra work to catch up, or she could go back by a few months and effectively lose a school year.

We're also concerned about the change of languages, so we plan to teach her some Spanish, possibly through an internet school, for a few months before we go back to Equatorial Guinea.

The other big thing is the mismatch of the two education systems and making sure that she has the knowledge she needs to make a successful transition between the systems. To do that we'll need to do some teaching ourselves.

We are always concerned about Talitha's education, that is why we put her in a good school in Brazil, so that she can go further in her academic education.

Q You've mentioned teaching her yourselves a couple of times – would you consider home education?

We're happy to do some teaching, but only as a supplement, or completion, of her main school education. There are a few reasons – Talita is gregarious and needs to be with other children and makes friends easily. We wouldn't want her to be isolated socially. We're happy with the schools she attends in Equatorial Guinea and here in Brazil. The one in Equatorial Guinea is more traditional, but follows a good programme from Spain. There aren't any home education programmes in Portuguese available to us to use overseas, and attendance at school is compulsory here – full home schooling is illegal.

Q Apart from these educational issues, do you see any other challenges?

Not too many, but sometimes there can be a clash of cultures. Sometimes she will say that she prefers the African way still.

In the future we can see that many of the local friends will grow apart from her. Typically the girls there expect to marry early and see no future in study, even though they may be encouraged to stay at school. This will probably distance her from some of the friends of her early childhood.

At the beginning of our ministry in Equatorial Guinea we thought that children were not missionaries together with their parents. They and the parents went through difficulties together and the children didn't necessarily know why, but now we think they are called in the same way as their parents and are part time missionaries with them.

One of the challenges that Talitha is facing now it is taking time for her to make new friends. She is now feeling loneliness due to not understanding her friends. She has been at school for a month so far and now we are realising this issue.

Q What do you see as the advantages to Talita of the cross-cultural lifestyle?

Quite a few! First of all, she has good language skills in both Spanish and Portuguese.

Having grown up surrounded by lots of people in an open and friendly society in Africa has helped her develop a warm, friendly and sensitive nature. Living among poor people has given her understanding of the deprived and what it means to live without a lot of material things. She understands the needs of the deprived, and doesn't demand these things personally. We feel that

she is mature for her age and enjoys the company of adults as well as other children – again partly a result of being in Africa.
She loves nature and the countryside, and loves Africa – her only comment about a way to “improve” it would be that it just needs cleaning up!
Overall we are all very positive about the cross-cultural lifestyle and the effects on Talita.