

Planning for the future of our TCKs - Developing Mother Tongue Skills

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Of the many decisions parents need to make regarding their children's education and development when they prepare to live outside their home country one extremely important decision is how to maintain and develop their mother tongue skills. This is the case for many if the language of education for any of the education options in the place of assignment is not the mother tongue. This is true for native English speakers as well as non-native English speakers.

Language Proficiency

- BICS and CALP
 - Bilingual Interpersonal Communication Skills
 - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
- 'BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school' (Cummins 2008: 108).

As I consult with parents this is one area where I have found it difficult at times to help parents understand the importance of developing their children's mother tongue skills. Many believe that just using their family language within the family will be sufficient for their children to maintain and develop those skills. Parents need to be helped to understand the difference between what is known as BICS and CALP, a theory developed in that late '70s by Cummins. He stated about non-native English speakers: "We should not assume that non-native speakers who have attained a high degree of fluency and accuracy in everyday spoken English have the corresponding academic language proficiency." If children are educated in a language other than their mother tongue that can be true of them too.

So what is the difference between BICS and CALP – 'BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school' (Cummins 2008: 108).

Language Proficiency

- Ultimately it is the responsibility of parents to ensure this happens – how can consultants help?
- Need to help parents develop an intentional plan to maintain and develop their mother tongue skills
- Explore services and resources available in the place of assignment eg Mother Tongue Studies within the school curriculum
- What resources are available in the home country to use?

Those of us in Sending Agencies need to help parents develop an intentional plan to maintain and develop their children's mother tongue skills

We will now share some examples of how this has worked out in different situations.

Planning for the future of our TCKs – case studies

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Here I will provide two mini-case studies of situations of families working overseas with a child with special needs.

Mini-case study 1

- Family with three young children in a village allocation and homeschooling
 - Mum was struggling with home schooling
 - Felt it was her lack
 - Home School Coordinator recognised some issues with one of the children
 - Parents advised to have assessment
 - Outcome was that the one child needed extra support
 - Administration required family to re-locate to the city so that child could attend school and receive the appropriate support

The first family situation I am presenting here is that of a village allocated family where the mother was homeschooling two of her three children and also had a toddler. The family enjoyed their living situation and were well received in their area. However, the mother was struggling with homeschooling and felt she was failing as a homeschooling mum. The homeschooling coordinator, however, felt there were one of the children was showing signs of some educational and developmental issues and recommended that the parents have the child assessed. The parents were initially resistant to the idea but the administration supported the recommendation and parents agreed.

Mini-case study 1

- Family found this difficult to accept
- Administration response : relocation or repatriation for the sake of the whole family
- Family retained village home
- Father made work trips as needed to village during school time
- Family able to live there during school vacations
- Outcome was good for the whole family
- Mother's self-esteem increased, child well supported at school

Although the family found the administration's requirement that they re-locate to the city difficult to accept the outcome proved to be good for the whole family. They were able to retain their village home and the whole family were able to live there during school vacations. The mother's self-esteem increased and the child was well supported at school and has since flourished.

Was the administration's requirement harsh? It may have seemed to be so but their concern was for the whole family, that the whole family should be able to thrive and their duty of care was for the whole family and not just for the work the father was able to produce.

Mini-case study 2

- Family with four children, one diagnosed with Asperger's
- Applied to mission school for a place for this child
- School required official confirmation of diagnosis and support needs
- Parents were resistant to providing that information other than verbally
- Sending agency worked with parents to provide necessary information to school

Again this scenario is one in which different parts of the organisation worked with a family to provide care and support needed although not recognised at the time by the family. Here we have a family with four children of whom one had been diagnosed with Asperger's. The parents had applied for a place for this child at the mission school. And the school requested official confirmation of the diagnosis and the support needed for this child. Although this may seem a reasonable request the parents were very resistant to providing that information other than verbally. The sending agency was asked to intervene and encourage the parents to comply with the request. The sending agency worked with the parents to provide the school with the necessary information.

Mini-case study 2

- Why did the school have such requirements?
 - Previous experience had shown they needed to be sure they would be able to support this student
- Parents were also reluctant to have too many people know the diagnosis
- School set their requirements regarding who should know, including the house boarding parents and peers
- Parents did accept the need to release information and understood it was for the good of their child

Why was the school insistent that they needed this information? The Principal explained that previous experience had made them realise they needed to be as sure they could provide the support needed.

The parents were also reluctant to have too many people know the diagnosis. But the school set their requirements regarding who should know including the house boarding parents and the child's peers. Again, encouraged by the sending agency the parents did accept the need to release information and understood it was for the good of their child, that he would be better understood and supported.