



“A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents’ culture.” Dave Pollock

Contents

Page 2 - Long-term planning

Page 7 - TCKs as cross-cultural kids; cross-cultural marriage

Educare is an e-magazine written for TCKs, their families and supporters as well as anyone concerned for their welfare.

It can be distributed freely to anyone who would benefit from it.

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Long-term Planning

In Educare December 2008 we wrote about the need for long-term planning for our children's education. Recently I was invited to look again at this subject at the recent Eurotck 2013 conference in Germany when co-presenting a seminar on long-term planning towards university and/or vocational training.

In doing so we created a revised questionnaire resource and reconsidered the whole process of beginning LT planning with families when they first apply to work with us.

The need for LT planning is the same as ever. Decisions made when the children are very young as well as those made in teen years can have a lifelong impact. It is more important to make plans when taking the children outside of the passport country where the parents are familiar with the education system and the children should progress through it according to their ability. As soon as the move outside of that system is made decisions can become more complicated. The net effect is more often than not enriching, but it does require more thought and planning by the parents.



Planning for the future is critical for East Asian families, particularly Koreans where very few children outside of the country will study in Korean. The result is that the children become cultural and linguistic outsiders who will be unlikely to study at university there, unless there are special measures taken to find a route back in. This could be via a sympathetic international school in Korea such as Sejong Global School or it could be into one of the growing number of university courses taught in English. Even learning in English though is no guarantee of success because of the

cultural outsider feeling and lack of Korean-language skills in other areas of life.

Faced with these factors planning needs to start early and expectations need to be realistic. If the goal is a prestigious academic university then education options have to be worked out accordingly to gain the relevant entrance requirements.

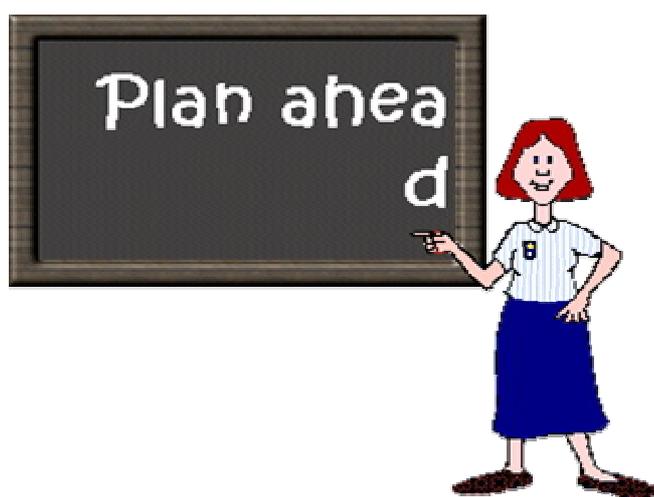
A big development in our favour in most countries now is that there are more routes than ever into higher education. This includes different routes via college courses as well as the traditional school leaving qualifications and also many more opportunities for adult education and study as mature students. Therefore a student who needs another year or two to upgrade academic mother tongue skills for university entrance isn't necessarily disadvantaged - plus there is almost certainly the balancing factor that they have a very high level of their school's educational language - usually up to first language standard. This level would take years of university study and practice to match.

For many parents the expectation is that their children will go to university - usually the hope is that the study will be in the passport country. In most cases that is probably realistic - by definition many of our parents are academics and their children are likely to be the same. However it is worth all parents at least considering with their children the options for study in an increasingly mobile university world. For example university courses are offered in English in

many European and Asian countries that are much cheaper than the in the USA, the UK or many other Anglophone countries. In many cases the universities concerned are high up in international comparisons.

The other thing to consider is that university isn't for everyone. Technical and vocational training routes often lead more directly to good jobs and may well be better suited to the academic ability and skills of the students in question. I remember talking with one TCK who after considering various university options informed me that he planned to be an electrician. I was really pleased to hear that knowing the need in his passport country for skilled electricians and knowing that a good job suited to his abilities would be his if he followed through with that idea. A good number of our BCS graduates from Senegal have taken the technical and vocational route of training and are now enjoying good careers as a result of that.

Volunteer NGOs and similar agencies tend to be ahead in taking long-term planning seriously. In many cases businesses and diplomatic services do little or nothing except provide the necessary money to pay for international schooling. That's fine as far as it goes, but moves can be made every 2 to 3 years based on the parents' jobs with no thought about the consequences for the children. Pay for the school that they will transfer to and all will be well is largely the philosophy at work - part of the "golden handcuffs" package as one consultant working with business families put it to us. No amount of money will compensate for badly timed moves that children are ill prepared for. Instead it would be so much better to for the managers and HR departments in the business and diplomatic communities to work out long-term plans with the families on the best timing for the inevitable moves. NGO agency assignments tend to be longer than in business and diplomatic circles making long-term planning a bit easier and usually plans are made together with the families. However there are still far too many cases even in our NGOs and volunteer agencies of pressure being placed on parents to move followed by expectations that the children will be fine and pick up the pieces.



Good Planning helps avoid unexpected problems!!

Planning needs to follow these principles

1. It needs to start as soon as an overseas move is being planned.
2. It needs to be promoted by the agency concerned and worked out with the family.
3. It has to be realistic and worked out with competent advisers
4. It has to be flexible - what happens if plan A doesn't work?

5. All the children must be considered - all too easily plans are made that suit the eldest and the siblings must follow on.
6. Long-term re-entry issues of language knowledge and cultural factors have to be considered. E.g. for most children academic mother tongue is crucial and must be a factor in planning.
7. The end product of the child's education has to be suited to their academic re-entry needs. This is now easier than before with more standardised international comparisons of school qualifications as a result of the Bologna Process and other related initiatives. However there are still some home education programmes that don't lead to a recognised qualification, therefore these aren't relevant to most children's educational needs between 14-18.

So how can we begin the planning process in practice?

When a family applies to our agency we should begin the discussion on this issue as soon as possible. Normally an informal meeting to ask a few key questions would be a good start. This isn't a complete list by any means but a few pointers would be

- What is the family situation? How many children and what kind of academic ability or potential do they have? It is likely to be more straightforward for a family with one or two children with high academic ability than if they have several children one or more of whom has special educational needs.
- How do the parents cope with stress and family management? What are the levels of stress generally in the family and how do they manage when those levels are inevitably raised during all the preparations and moving? For some parents who cope well in all of this change home education could well be a good option. For others who are already struggling it could be a disaster zone and the daily structure of going to school would be a lot better.
- What are the expectations of the parents for the children's academic future? There is a spectrum ranging from very relaxed attitudes - it will work out fine according to the children's abilities, right through to parents who plan only for top universities. It really helps if parents instil a lifelong learning attitude in the children so that delays or alternative routes along the way don't seem to cause irreparable problems.
- Finances. If a family has a high salary or good sponsoring support then the options for the children are much wider. Without strong finances options are limited and detrimental decisions are often forced - e.g. unsuitable local schools; the cheapest (but not necessarily the best) home education materials; living with friends or relatives at a great distance from the parents so that the child can attend school.
- Agency and team policies. Most agencies have left behind the bad old days of forcing, or at least pressurising, families to accept rigid educational policies. However, there still seem to be a small number of teams that insist on tight adherence to local policy. One we heard of recently requires all children to attend local schools - no debate. That kind of rigidity should make home offices wary of sending families to such teams, especially any family where there is a risk that it won't work with no flexibility or plan B permitted.
- Expected location of service - there are more options of course in major cities, very few in rural settings. This is really obvious in the distribution of agency personnel with the very large majority of families now in cities clustered around suitable schools.

This informal discussion would then lead on to a consideration of the various options available in the country of service. At this point it's a useful exercise to look at a resource such as a

questionnaire - a newly produced one for discussion at Eurotck 2013 is included below. This can either be given in advance to work through and then discuss or it could be worked through together during discussions. The questionnaire isn't meant to be a fully exhaustive end in itself but rather a discussion tool to encourage parents and agencies to think through the key issues for their children's education. Any feedback or suggestions for improvements are very welcome.

Throughout the process the agency and others involved in sending and supporting have a clear responsibility to ensure that the proposed education is suitable for the children concerned. This all needs to be worked out with the parents before any assignment is ratified. As part of our duty of care to families our agencies need clear policies to ensure that no child will be sent anywhere until that suitable education is worked out.

Long-term Planning Guide

The answer spaces have been removed to save space in the Educare e-magazine.

(To be completed in discussion with the TCK Consultant)

1. Basic Information About Family

Names and ages of children

Nationality/nationalities of children and parents

If currently in school general information about academic progress so far. Is it consistent with the peer group, above or below average?

Any specific areas of difficulty such as mathematics, reading or writing?

Are there any recognised special needs, or do you have any concerns of your own in this area?

2. Route to the Host Country

Anticipated country of service

Expected route to that country

Training requirements already met

Further training requirements, including any that take place in another country

Expected time of arrival on field

3. Long-term goals for children

Write a short comment on how important the criteria listed below are to you and rate how important these are to you on a 1-10 scale, 10 being the highest priority.

Learning of host language

Integration into host culture

Learning the mother tongue

Achieving their academic best to move on to passport country university or technical & vocational training course

The education they follow develops a worldview compatible with our own

The need for friends and social acceptance

Social development to be a whole and healthy young adult

Opportunities to develop aesthetic and creative skills

Opportunities for sport and physical activity

Developing independence and re-entry skills

4. Understanding of options (including any training in countries en route)

Are the following available? State yes or no and then explain the option and any implications for you now.

Local school - private or government

International school - low-cost volunteer NGO or secular

Home school/home-based education

Home-based with co-op school support

5. a) Expected plan now with pros and cons

Specify this for each child from the start of education through to university or training. Where transitions from one system to another are expected specify the planned age of the child at this transition. Use a separate piece of paper for subsequent children.

1st Child

2nd Child

3rd Child

b) Reserve plans

c) Funding issues

Are the expected and reserve plans in line with the long-term goals? If there are areas where they aren't what can be done to correct that?

Steve Bryant April 2013 (To be used and adapted freely with permission)

TCKs as Cross-cultural Kids; Cross-cultural Marriage

There are 5 major groups of TCKs - the children of

- Diplomats
- International businessmen and women
- Travelling academics in universities and international schools
- Personnel serving with the military - either in active service or admin support
- NGO staff

There are other smaller groups such as the children of adventurers or of other temporary migrants. Each group has its individual characteristics, but also many of the shared ones that have been widely discussed and explained in TCK literature and websites - namely mobility, constant change, cultural transitions, and re-entry to the passport country.

TCKs also share many similar experiences with a wide range of other groups such as immigrants and even more so their children who live between two cultures, cross-cultural adoptees, international students, refugees and asylum seekers, and children of cross-cultural marriages. That puts TCKs within a broader group of cross-cultural children. These shared experiences give natural points of contact. It is no accident that many TCKs are more at ease with international students and immigrants than with monocultural peers during their studies. This often leads to friendship and sharing student accommodation. Inevitably it sometimes leads on to marriage as well.

Generally in terms of personnel care the voluntary NGO community is ahead of the other groups in its understanding of TCKs and how to support them and their families. That doesn't always guarantee good outcomes of course, some agencies are too small to do what they know to be good practice and families in some larger ones can "fall through the cracks" with everyone thinking that someone else is looking after them.

Normally though the understanding of and desire to support TCKs and their families is there. The volunteer agencies are in a good position to help these other groups with resources and advice where we have learned from individually costly past mistakes as well as learned good practice. One such area where our experiences can be helpful is that of cross-cultural marriage.

The short section following is taken from the "Caring For Our TCKs" e-book (2nd Ed 2010, updating 1st Ed 2002 TCK Manual by Jean Barnicoat) and is a general introduction to the subject of cross-cultural marriage designed to set us thinking about this very important subject to so many of our couples and children.

As more and more people from all over the world work in NGOs there has been a corresponding increase in the number of marriages crossing different cultural backgrounds. Around 20% of the marriages in our own agency are cross-cultural and this is typical of most of the agencies that recruit more internationally. This includes couples who share the same mother tongue, but come from different countries (e.g. Swiss/German or American/British). The differences may not be as great as an Asian-Western or Latin-Western mix, but they are still there and need to be recognised. That 20% doesn't include those of TCKs to monocultural background spouses sharing the same nationality, these need to be recognised as cross-cultural marriages in many ways and are very common in NGO circles given the very high numbers of TCKs that we recruit. Just because the cross-cultural elements may not be immediately apparent doesn't make them any less significant.

This has consequences for agency HR staff, but even more so for the couple themselves and for their children. When we consider the cultural adjustments that TCKs need to make, the scale of those adjustments may be even more significant if there is another culture from within the family to be added into this mix.

Couples in cross-cultural marriages need to face certain issues head on. Discipline and how that is administered, for example, has to be addressed. Many of the children are going to be bilingual (at least), and the process of language development needs to be continued where there are conflicting demands and interests. The issue of schooling can be complicated further, particularly as the parents should be trying to think long-term as to where the children are going to spend their adult lives. Then there is the often tricky question of how to give adequate time to the in-laws who are at different ends of the world. Both sets of family need to spend time with the growing children - how is that going to be accomplished without adding to the cultural transitions that TCKs have to make?



Finally, there is the often highly emotive issue of 'identity' for the TCK teenagers. Which part of their heritage should they be loyal to? Is there one of the cultures for which the TCKs have a natural affinity? What if the growing TCKs just do not know where they want to be? Added to this is the consideration that our parents need to give to the possibility of their own children wanting to marry into the local culture or into yet another culture from the international mix they grow up in rather than go back to one of their parents' home culture to find a spouse.

Effective communication improves as both verbal skills such as grammar, tenses & vocabulary, and subtle non-verbal cues including gender/sexual ones, are learned and recognised. If one culture dominates because of other factors in the children's lives then the more subtle non-verbal communication of the other may be limited. Listening skills will improve as each becomes aware of what their minds are filtering out and therefore what is not being voiced or considered valid. These filters will include cultural values of time, worth, relationships and work.

During the first few years the couple need to develop their own culture, not dominated by one or the other of their own - an area in their relationship in which both have come to understand the other and therefore they are at ease. The boundaries of this zone increase throughout the marriage but will be challenged as the couple moves from place to place.