

## TEACHING AND SERVING STUDENTS OF HIDDEN AND APPARENT DIVERSITY: THIRD CULTURE KIDS AND CROSS CULTURE KIDS

**Patricia A. Stokke**

*Edd, MA, BS, West Valley College (USA)*

### Abstract

Increasingly students live mobile lives, whether they move across countries or travel daily across borders or cities. The outcomes of these unique experiences may result in challenges with a 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. If every “experience has a formative effect on the constitution of the human being” (END, 2023) and we accept that education is one of those experiences, it is necessary to recognize and address the influence of cultural experiences on student educational outcomes.

This paper discusses the need for educators to identify and understand students who are living in transitions between their parents’ home and host countries and cultures. These individuals referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) have similar challenges as 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).

The terms hidden diversity, TCKs, and CCKs are defined below. The challenges facing these student populations, including their needs and strengths that emerge from their unique cross cultural and transitional growing up experiences are presented. Teaching and serving students of hidden and apparent diversity is based on research in the fields of cross-culture and third culture kids, global transitions, cultural diversity, cross-cultural and international education.

incluKit©, a game from diversophy®, that engages educators and staff to explore dealing with diverse cultures in education will be introduced and critical incidents will be presented in a gamified manner to be discussed in small groups during the workshop.

**Keywords:** *Diversity, culture, education, third culture kids, transitions.*

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### 1. Introduction

The unique experience of students living mobile lives, whether globally because of parents’ transnational careers or traveling daily across borders or cities, often results in challenges of belonging and academic progression. Consequently, educators have a responsibility to understand the complexity of these experiences and their impact on educational success. There can be a tendency to accept one’s own way as the way, creating blinders to differences in approaches to teaching and serving students. Understanding and learning how to effectively approach diverse worldviews and schemas are vital to supporting positive student outcomes.

The purpose of this paper and workshop is to support educators to better understand, serve, and educate students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including cultural experiences that are hidden and mobile. 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...” (Van Reken, Pollock, & Pollock, 2009, p. 60). Hidden diversity is used as a descriptor because cultural identities often are unrecognized or unacknowledged by the individuals themselves or others. Hidden because their cultural identities or backgrounds are not seen either because the individual does not “look” like what others expect them to look like, or because their life experiences have cross cultural influences not readily apparent to others. These cross-cultural experiences may influence students’ ways of thinking about, approaching, and interacting with their environments, which can be different than students, faculty, and staff from monocultural and culturally dominant backgrounds.

How then do educators and student service professionals teach and serve these students effectively? First, they need to identify and understand these students’ third culture or cross culture

experiences. Second, they need to learn about the needs and potential strengths of TCKs and CCKs. Finally, they need to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to better teach and serve students of hidden and apparent diversity.

## **2. Objectives**

- a) Define hidden diversity, third culture kids, and cross culture kids.
- b) Identify the needs and potential strengths of culturally diverse students.
- c) Practice constructive approaches to teaching and serving students of hidden diversity.

## **3. Discussion**

### **3.1. 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). These individuals' 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 several cultural identities and practices, but upon return to her "home" country she is expected to reintegrate as part of the dominant culture. She looks like she fits in with White culture 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).

Cross Culture Kids (CCKs), the umbrella term that encompasses TCKs, consists of individuals from diverse cultural experiences. For example, students who travel across town from culturally diverse neighborhoods to college campuses in monoculturally dominant areas of cities, or students who immigrated with parents to new countries. CCKs daily study in new cultures but go 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.

### **3.2. TCK, CCK, global nomad challenges and strengths**

Considering the neuroscience behind culture and education may give insight into why education may 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 Indigenous and Eastern cultural worldviews are often from a holistic perspective that is nonlinear. This difference can make it challenging for students from these groups to learn in a Western educational environment.

The power dynamic between student and instructor may also be affected by culture. Power distance (Hofstede, 2001) may influence their relationships with authority figures and comfort levels for questioning and challenging their instructors.

A strength with a flip side for TCKs is the tendency to be cultural chameleons. The desire and ability to adapt to new circumstances, developed during transitions 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.

### **3.3. 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, 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 impact their teaching and interactions with students. Therefore, 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 self-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, whether from Indigenous, Eastern, or Western educational backgrounds? Do I make assumptions about their identities? Do I notice and acknowledge my students' cultural backgrounds?

Educators can explore questions such as those mentioned above in a personal reflection journal or discuss cultural situations with colleagues to explore their cultural selves. Activities in workshops that explore cross cultural critical incidents in small groups can be facilitated in a discussion format or in a gamified fashion using a game of cultural competence such as incluKit© from diversophy® (Simons, n.d.).

Other strategies to encourage direction and confidence include building upon TCK's and CCK's strengths by acknowledging and developing their potential for connecting across differences and leadership capabilities (Stokke, 2013).

#### 4. Conclusions

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), then educators need to acknowledge the unique struggle and strength of students in cultural transitions and address the challenge of living and surviving in multiple cultures. First, by understanding their own cultural selves and second by adapting their teaching schemas to become culturally responsive educators and support the learning of TCKs and CCKs.

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