

# Chapter 17

## International School Teachers' Professional Development in Response to the Needs of Third Culture Kids in the Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter draws on an exploratory qualitative study of 20 teaching staff at an international school in Singapore to examine the professional development needs of international school teachers in response to the needs of Third Culture Kids (TCKs). It explores what the needs of TCKs are, whether teachers at an international school in Singapore have the skills and competencies to be responsive to these needs, and where gaps in professional development for international schoolteachers may exist. Evidence shows that no professional development training in relation to TCKs is provided specific to the international context in which teachers are employed. Issues that are poorly addressed include staff induction, student transitions and identity issues, language support, pastoral care, and curriculum training. Findings contribute to the educational leadership and management of international schoolteachers by contextualizing professional development as a facet of organizational leadership.*

### INTRODUCTION

As the demand for expatriates in Asia increases (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2008; McNulty, De Cieri, & Hutchings, 2013), the necessity for international schools to cater for the children of expatriates ('third culture kids' or TCKs) has become criti-

cal. This is in part due to the growing numbers of children now entering international schools in Asia (Siong, 2012; Tanu, 2008, 2010), resulting from the 'normalisation' of global mobility as a typical and expected part of one's career progression (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010). It is also partly due to the improved quality of international schooling

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options, including the growing popularity of and demand for the *International Baccalaureate* (IB), which has subsequently negated the necessity for many expatriates to send their children to boarding school or to return to their home-country to ensure a satisfactory education (Bunnell, 2005b). The purpose of the study is to examine international school teachers professional development needs in response to the needs of TCKs. The fundamental argument is drawn from Grimshaw and Sears (2008), wherein the needs of TCKs differ from those of non-expatriate families. As such, international school teachers may require a specialised set of skills and competencies to effectively cater for the specific needs of TCKs in the classroom.

This study contributes to the extant literature on international education by extending the very small number of empirical studies primarily conducted in the 1990s which explore international school teachers' professional development (e.g. Black & Armstrong, 1995; Black, Harvey, Hayden, & Thompson, 1994). In drawing on data from 20 teaching staff at an international school in Singapore, the study aims to give international school teachers a voice in which to share their 'lived experience' regarding TCKs in the international school setting. A further contribution is that by adopting a qualitative research approach, the study reveals perceptions and findings that can be compared with other studies to deepen what is currently understood about the professional development needs of international school teachers (e.g., Richards, 2002). Additionally, it aims to provide useful insights for education administrators as to where current gaps and difficulties in professional development for international school teachers may exist. Lastly, the practical implications of our findings are discussed through the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Papalia & Feldman, 2012). This theory explains how everything within an individual (i.e., the international school teacher) and within an individual's environment (i.e., the

international school) impacts and influences their growth and development (in this case when working with TCKs in the classroom).

The chapter commences with a brief overview of TCKs, including the challenges and issues faced or experienced by TCKs. Next, it briefly reviews professional development for teachers currently being provided. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology, after which findings are presented, concluding with a discussion and overall implications of the study for research and practice.

### **THIRD CULTURE KIDS (TCKs)**

Third Culture Kids are the children of parents who live in a foreign country for their work (Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). Such 'work' may include occupations in the military, diplomatic corps, mission field, non-profit sector, education, and international business. TCKs spend a significant portion of their developmental years (birth to 18 years of age) outside their parents' culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Useem (1973) defines three cultures that TCKs inhabit. The first is a child's country of origin and/or parental culture, of which they hold a passport but in which they may or may not have been born. The second culture is the host country in which a child is currently living. The third culture is the community within the second culture that a TCK most identifies with in terms of a shared lifestyle and meaning (e.g., an expatriate compound or an international school). The TCK experience is marked by the continual process of living in and among different cultures, which Pollock and van Reken (2009) argue 'affects the deeper rather than the more superficial parts of [TCKs] personal or cultural being'.

Therefore, the TCK's life is impacted by two interconnected realities of being raised in and experiencing: (1) a truly cross-cultural world beyond only watching, studying, or analyzing

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