

**INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF  
THIRD CULTURE KIDS IN THE CLASSROOM**

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

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## **Abstract**

*This article 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 school teachers 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 school teachers' by contextualizing professional development as a facet of organizational leadership. This research is salient in informing the professional development agenda for teachers in the international school context, both in Singapore and further afield wherever international school teachers may be employed.*

Key words: Professional development, international schools, teaching staff, ethnic pedagogy, third culture kids, expatriates, curriculum, training

## **INTRODUCTION**

As the demand for expatriates in Asia increases (Czinkota and 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 critical. 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, in part, due to the improved quality of international schooling 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 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 article commences with a brief overview of TCKs, including the challenges and issues that TCKs face. 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

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 eighteen) outside their parents' culture (Pollock and 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 may or may not have been born in. 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*'. The TCK life is therefore impacted by two interconnected realities of being raised in, and experiencing: (1) a truly cross-cultural world beyond only watching, studying or analyzing other cultures from a distance; and (b) a highly mobile world which continually changes in terms of people, places, and things. For many TCKs, these realities manifest in a sense of rootlessness and a lack of full ownership in any one culture they inhabit in spite retaining a relationship to all (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). Hence, the TCK experience often creates a subtle underlying tension as a child struggles to develop, at its most basic level, a sense of identity, relationships with others, and their own view of the world during a fragile stage of their development, i.e. the early and adolescent years. For this reason, TCKs can be perceived as victims of globalisation where culture and identity collide. Yet, the TCK experience can also foster positive gains, and not in the least the development of a skill-set that is highly sought after on the international labour market (Selmer & Lam, 2004; The Straits Times, 2011).

In adapting from Grimshaw and Sears (2008), the conceptual framework that underpins the study relates to TCK identity as a socially constructed phenomenon in response to one's lived experience and social interaction with others of a similar background. It includes that individuals can be conditioned by others, as well as the '*broader narrative discourse*' that exists (p. 73), which may subsequently challenge their academic and social wellbeing (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). A central argument is that international schools play an important role in helping TCKs socially construct their identity. This is because international schools share several common characteristics that TCKs come to understand as 'normal': teachers, staff and students are multi-culturally diverse, and there is a high turnover of the student body (Langford, 1998; MacDonald, 2006). Moreover, while the content of children's stories in the international school community may differ, the experience of the TCK is nonetheless universally understood much like a familiar script (Pascoe, 2009).

An international school is defined as one that is '*independent of any national system of education, and that offers a curriculum which is different from that in the host country*' (Black & Armstrong, 1995, p27). In essence, an international school is the 'third culture' in which many TCKs are immersed and in which they find comfort, security, and a sense of shared identity. The significance of the third culture is therefore critical and has been shown to help TCKs thrive in their international environment (Sears, 2011; Tsumagari, 2010), largely because it provides them with a sense of belonging in relationship to others of a similar background (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). Consequently, it is imperative that teachers' are knowledgeable about the issues facing TCKs so that they are responsive to their needs within the context of the learning and teaching environment. Indeed, research demonstrates that there are many factors that affect TCKs resilience that impacts their academic performance, and social and

emotional wellbeing as both children and adults (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). It is argued that an environment in which the TCK phenomenon is reflected in the curriculum and can become part of the culture of a school community (e.g. its vision and mission) will enhance the overall wellbeing and wholeness of the child.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS**

Interest in the professional development of teachers stems from the well documented research linking quality professional development and quality learning and teaching environments (Raban et al., 2007; Rodd, 2006). This research has consistently demonstrated that the professional development of teachers is the cornerstone of excellence, wherein ongoing staff professional development contributes to the optimal development of children, and reflects the quality of the curriculum and pedagogy children are immersed in. Adapting from Evers, Kreijns, Van de Heijden and Gerrichhauzen (2011), teachers' professional development is defined as authentic participation in professional learning sessions including training, reading, dialoguing, experimenting, reflecting, and collaborative activities, which can be both formally delivered and informally experienced as on-the-job work integrated learning.

Professional development in recent years has evolved to a participant driven approach, focusing on process driven reflective practice and capacity building (e.g. Robinson & Carrington, 2002). This represents an intentional shift towards a constructivist approach to professional development, placing the teacher at the centre of these activities. Such an approach supports teachers in constructing their own knowledge and competencies for the context of their particular professional learning community. It also highlights the importance of collegial reflective dialogue in the workplace and is compatible with a focus on continuous lifelong learning for continuous improvement. Staff narratives of reflective practice provide the platform for capacity building. Resonating with the shift towards reflective professional development, this process supports teachers to engage as reflective practitioners in reflective action: to build on and from their experiences; and to be actively engaged in developing theories that they can use in practice (Gould & Baldwin, 2004). Reflective action focuses on ongoing learning for continuous improvement.

Despite the growth in size and diversity of international schools in Asia, Holderness (2001) argues that little formal research has been undertaken on international school teachers. Of existing research, a small number of studies have focused on methods to recruit teachers and the high turnover of staff (e.g. Cambridge, 2002), rather than how they are supported and professionally developed. To date, no research has examined the ongoing professional development needs of teachers and school administrators in international school settings. Bunnell (2005a) suggests that few schools offer a comprehensive induction-training program for new teachers, with Hayden (2002) commenting that '*no specific training is provided to international school staff ... before they embark upon their international school experience*' (p. 117). One possible reason for the lack of professional development is the contractual nature of international school teachers' appointments, where short-term and fixed-tenure contracts can result in professional development neither being offered nor requested (Holderness, 2002). This is in contrast to Hardman's (2001) findings which show that the main motivator for joining an international school is 'professional advancement'. Hence, the concept of professional development in the international school setting appears to be of increasing importance (Richards, 2002).

## **FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

Few, if any, studies have addressed the issue of international school teachers' professional development in terms of knowledge about TCKs and translation of this knowledge within the pedagogy of teaching. Building on existing literature (e.g. Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2011; Evers et al., 2011; Sears, 2011), this study is salient in informing the professional development agenda for teachers in the international school context, both in Singapore and in countries wherever international school teachers are employed. Three specific research questions are outlined:

1. How do international school teachers define TCKs?
2. To what extent do international school teachers have experience with, and exposure to, TCK professional development and learning?
3. What do international school teachers prioritise in terms of TCK professional development?

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as the theoretical foundation of this qualitative study. This theory has its roots in phenomenology, holding “that human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather that they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 88). As such, this research has concentrated on the exploration of international school teacher participants, and interpretation of their own lived experiences, perceptions and mindsets about their TCK professional development experiences.

IPA methodology recognizes the participant’s expert yet subjective knowledge and experiences of TCK professional development and the research teams interpretation of these experiences, with the interpretative role of researchers being central to their reflections, analysis and construction of new knowledge.

## **TEACHER INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS**

Focus groups were used as the means of gathering data, utilizing a schedule of semi-structured questions to guide the group discussion. In September 2011, 20 teaching staff at an international school in Singapore volunteered to participate in two focus groups (10 in each). Given the limited time teachers have available to participate in outside activities, this methodology is seen as most appropriate as data can be collected quickly and efficiently over a short period of time. Focus groups can also facilitate better quality data collection where individuals may be reluctant to share or disclose their views and opinions in one-on-one settings (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008). These focus group interviews were used to explore international school teachers TCK professional development experiences.

Participants were recruited via email invitation disseminated by a senior member of staff at the school who facilitated the research team’s access. An invitation letter outlining the project details were attached to the email invitation, along with a consent form. Staff volunteering to participate indicated their interest and availability to the senior staff member at the school, who then informed the research team. Participants ranged from active full-time teaching staff, counselors, subject teachers, learning support, and heads of departments. Participants were drawn across the primary and secondary school. These staff can be expected to be well-informed about both professional development and international school settings. Focus groups were held immediately after school hours, in the school library, and were recorded. Focus groups ran for approximately 1 hour 30 minutes each, being facilitated by a member of the research team.

Data were analysed using NVIVO v9.0. Transcripts were content analysed and common themes identified. To facilitate greater reliability and validity of the data, both researchers analysed data independently to facilitate a process of inter-rater reliability, coming together post-analysis to discuss discrepancies and agree on common themes.

## **DEFINING TCKs**

Teachers’ were unclear as to how a TCK is defined in terms of the role of the ‘third’ culture. Within the broader definition offered by Useem (1973) and Pollock and van Reken (2009), it was found that the third culture is defined as one based on the national culture of the host country, as typified in the following comment:

When a kid moves to another country, then they have the culture of their parents - assuming that is one culture, which often it is not. Then they have the country’s culture, and those combined make a third culture for a kid.

Most teachers technical understanding of the ‘third culture’ that informs TCKs experience was therefore limited. Findings here were consistent regardless of whether teachers were new to the international school context (i.e. their first international school post), were TCKs themselves, or had taught previously at international schools in various locations and had acquired a relatively lengthy exposure to international school students, for example, with 20 years or more experience in overseas education. Despite a lack of technical knowledge about the term ‘TCK’, a small number of teachers

brought considerable understanding of the issues facing TCKs having been, or raising, a TCK themselves. The following comment attests to this deep level of understanding:

I saw a checklist for what defines a TCK, and it's basically - did you fly before you could walk? have you had a passport before you had a learners permit? do you speak more than one language? do you not get what everyone is talking about when you fly home? you're not sure where home is? when people ask you where is home you go 'well, I was born here and then we went there' and you don't know how to answer that question? And I thought, that's not a subset of our kids, that's all of them!

Some teachers expressed concern that many students were oblivious to being identified as a TCK and the potential challenges associated with this terminology:

I would say many of our kids don't recognise that they are TCKs. They probably don't know what it means, and don't understand it, because I know in our pastoral care program we haven't directly addressed it.

## **TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE WITH TCK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The findings indicate that there is no clear answer as to how international school teachers' receive their learning and training specific to TCK professional development in the international school context, translating their learning into their subject/classroom teaching, learning, and assessment. Mirroring other findings in relation to general professional development (e.g. Hayden, 2002), teachers do not perceive that they are provided with specific and relevant formal training to help them acquire expertise on managing TCKs. As one teacher stated:

It's pretty much up to the individual teacher to take the initiative to try and address these things. In terms of a formal mechanism that not only educates staff but educates the community and also supports these kids? It doesn't exist yet ... the parents email us all the time, they will just come and pop in and have a chat, that's the only avenue that we have at the moment.

Of the professional development training teachers have acquired, much is received informally on an ad-hoc basis, typically by being overseas, working internationally, and the frequency through which they relocate to new locations. This personal experience then infiltrates through the classroom:

It's the support network of their friends that helps ... for example, with the younger ones, if I was given a new student I would often take aside a small group of kids who I knew what their experience had been like and I would say, "Can you look after this guy for a little while, just show him around?" But that was something that I did. That wasn't something the school mandated. I was just trying to make life easier for these kids when they came in half way through the year.

### **On-The-Job Training**

Professional development as on-the-job training emerged as a critical, albeit informal and reactive, method of training for international school staff. Teachers' capacity building in relation to managing the social and emotional development of TCKs was frequently gained through exposure to students' behaviour in the class, mostly without formal training as to how best to deal with it:

These kids didn't choose to be expatriates; most of the time the parents did. There's a high percentage of parents quite happy to go abroad but the kids are not ... for the older TCK, mum and dad are coming here for a career and they wind up on planes everywhere and not around. No one is there to actually see from a teen point of view, "I want to get pissed off with mum and dad and I want to show them I'm pissed off", but [the parents] are not even around. And so then it comes into the school ... it has to come out somewhere. They have to vent it somewhere.

Similarly, others' experience was gained through student interaction, with students' as teachers:

Picking their brains about what their childhood experience has been like, that's been really interesting for me just to hear that, because often I take for granted a lot of things that I might know about my students. I'm not a TCK. I thought I knew what their experience was like, but it has brought it home to me again, which has been good for me as their teacher.

A small number of staff were parents of TCKs themselves, with an even smaller number having been a TCK during their childhood years. For these staff, while their experience on the international school scene had been limited or relatively shorter in length, all believed that their personal experiences with their own children or their own childhood journey provided them with considerable knowledge and insight, personally and professionally, as to TCKs.

## **INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS' TCK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS**

Whilst all participants valued TCK professional development, many were frustrated with the depth, frequency and duration of the sessions. Seven themes pertaining to quality TCK professional development, located at different levels within the international school and host country environment, were identified from an analysis of data.

### **Structure of Professional Development**

An important issue is the structure and depth of the TCK professional development that is provided for international school teachers. Many staff spoke about attending school-sponsored workshops, however, these were perceived to be,

very informal, for example, staff induction on TCKs [was] sitting in a room full of 20 other newbies ... it was a 20-minute conversation.

Valuing the 20 minute professional development session, many staff viewed it as an opportunity for teachers to begin and/or continue engaging in their critical reflection about TCKs within the international school context where,

they don't provide a lot of answers, [but] it starts people on that journey of inquiring into what does it mean. We need to question how does that impact or influence our practice, our thinking.

Others were of the opinion that the TCK phenomenon is trivialized and not given the importance it deserves, instead being relegated to,

a very nice one-day celebration,

where the festivities amount to,

okay, everyone bring a flag and, okay, bring something from your country.

The general sentiment is that TCKs were not taken seriously by the school administration, and therefore TCK professional development was a non-event, and cursorily addressed wherein,

it's one day. What are you going to do for the rest of the days that the kids are here ... to make a school international?

One teacher summed up the frustration voiced by many participants by explaining:

This is not just like any other subject area. [It] deserves a certain amount of time and resourcing ... in terms of identifying a cultural identity that is yours. I don't think that it's seen through that lens.

Another suggested:

There's the old expression which is very big with the IB organisation in terms of celebrating the five F's: food, fashion, flags, famous people, and festivals. It's very superficial, and trying to get people to go deeper into it cannot be done, for example, in a PYP 6 or 7-week unit of inquiry. There needs to be something that really takes root and becomes a part of the culture of the school.

## **Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Staff were adamant that TCK professional development needs to concentrate on teachers' pedagogy. Teachers working in the early years discussed the ease with which they could diversify their program to cater for the cross cultural competence of TCKs, something that teachers in higher grades found difficult to achieve. For example, those working with TCKs who enter school at the pre-school stage find that they are able to honour children's heritage and life circumstances as part of the international mindedness component of their curriculum more readily than teachers of older students. This is because,

kids at a younger age tend to be a lot more pliable, they roll with things a bit better,

and because parents tend to be more involved in younger children's classroom activities. This results in a greater degree of cultural communication between home and school.

Additionally, familiarity and knowledge of a TCKs previous school's/country curriculum are seen as essential to support a child's transition into the teaching and learning program. There is, however, an ethical tension between developing an inclusive curriculum that is responsive to the individual needs of TCKs while also being faced with having to deliver curriculum and then deliver results to the international school employing authorities. As one teacher stated:

Are we dealing with the people, or are we dealing with the results? If we do differentiation, are [we] able to differentiate things really, really well at a higher level?

## **Pastoral Care and Counselling**

Teachers identified the importance of pastoral care professional development facilitated by the school counsellors so as to better equip them to respond to the social, emotional, and resilience needs of TCKs. This was found to be a particular need for secondary school subject teachers and home group teachers who,

don't really have contact time with students, they just come in your classroom and go again.

TCK identity issues were identified as being specifically related to older TCKs, with many staff voicing they were inadequately trained to deal with the issues:

In my experience, the ones who have been TCKs from an early age I don't struggle too much with those in the classroom. But I'm a middle school teacher and by the time they get to me, the ones who have just arrived and they're 14 years old, it's tough, they've never lived outside of their home country ... they're angry with their parents ... it's a difficult age to start with.

I have got some kids in my class who have struggled moving here and they've relayed to some other children in the classroom that they are fine now [but] they're still not fine, so it's borderline. Do they go to a counsellor? Mum's talking to me all the time and I'm trying - but I'm not trained. I don't know what to do. Mum's also having a hard time. I really don't know.

Supporting TCKs to develop resilience in the face of change and challenges was a priority area requiring attention at the school administration level. Some TCKs require teacher pastoral support, while others require a more serious level of intervention provided by qualified school counselors.

## **Induction Training for Staff and Students**

It is evident that teachers need a clear and transparent induction process to support their own, as well as TCKs, transition into the international school context. Current induction programs were viewed as

superficial, lacking in quality, and “*a lucky dip*”. For TCKs, the induction process seems to vary according to the dominant nationalities enrolled at the school and whether parents provide an informal support network. Curriculum induction and the particular age at which a student enters the curriculum program of the international school was reported as a further challenge for TCKs, their parents and teachers. Teachers recognize that there is limited, if any, support for students facing this challenge, particularly in relation to the language or terminology that is used as part of the ‘new’ curriculum. As one teacher explains,

Apart from year 6 when they have an induction to the MYP [Middle Years Program], if you start in any year other than at the very beginning of year 6, you have to pick it up as you go on. It’s pretty chunky stuff.

Another teacher shared a personal story in relation to her own child’s experience at the school, giving her invaluable insight into the potential challenges many TCKs face:

Our boy came in at year 10 and he’s been faced with having to do a personal project. [But] he had no exposure to any of the language of MYP at year 10 level because at least more than half of the teachers don’t use any MYP language when they teach. So we had to complete this enormous personal project not understanding the terminology. As a family it was a really, really big thing because he’s a kid who likes to work hard and do well, and yet he would come up with things and say ‘I don’t know what they mean by this [so] how can I comment?’ We spent weekend after weekend sitting down trying to teach him the terms. I did report that back to [name of colleague] and said ‘do you understand for the kids who are new to year 10 what an absolute mine field this is?’. Thing is – I am a teacher. All I could think of was what happens to the kids whose parents aren’t teachers, whose dad maybe travels all the time, mum’s at home with three or four kids and this kid’s trying to do their personal project? Or for the kids with the language difficulties. It would be terrible.

Providing a clear and transparent induction process was seen to ensure that teachers and students (and, in some instances, their parents and/or guardians) do not fall through the gaps in terms of transition, emotional, social, psychological, curriculum, and learning support. This induction needs to be ongoing throughout the year, but the question of whose jurisdiction it is to develop, implement and monitor the induction process remains unclear.

Reflecting on their class composition, some teachers voiced concern as to how best to support international students who are being educated in international schools cared for by guardians while their parents remain in their country of citizenship or elsewhere:

We’ve got kids with no parents at all, who come here as international students. They have guardians. We are very fortunate at this school to have a dedicated person who does look after them [but] some schools don’t have anything like that in place. The degree of responsibility and work that a guardian will do is so wide ... it creates further impact on these kids.

The family composition including siblings that remain in the country of citizenship while TCKs relocate to the host country was identified as a challenge many TCKs and their families experience. Labelled as ‘split families’ by the participants, examples were given where older siblings remain in a prior host- or home-country to attend university and the family structure in terms of first, second, and third child (and so on) subsequently changes, albeit temporarily. Teachers noticed that such changes impacted on student engagement in the curriculum and relationships with peers, which they often felt ill-equipped to deal with. Professional development in terms of supporting these students pastorally and academically was highlighted by staff in this study as a proactive way of supporting TCKs:

When families move here, some are split. One of the big issues for my family was leaving two boys behind to come here - there are two that I have left at home. It’s the idealisation of them as brothers. So the two that came here with us, they changed from being third and fourth children to first and second children, and the behaviours changed. It took me a couple of years as a parent, regardless of being a teacher, to realise that there were issues. And I have come across it a lot more since I was

working in the welfare program with the upper secondary kids. Often they are really missing their brothers and sisters that have been left at university, that have been left behind.

An additional aspect of student induction is that in some instances the year level and age differences across countries and hemispheres can be a problem, particularly when TCKs are older or younger in age than the typical age of the child in their class. This can impact on TCKs identity, wellbeing and ability to settle in. Although teachers often flagged this issue during enrolment, most TCKs were dismissive and unaware of the potential ramifications for themselves at some point once enrolment has passed. as one teacher explains:

I had a girl and she's older than all the kids in her year group because she's actually moved from China to Singapore from a northern hemisphere thing, so she's lost half a year coming here. She's actually a year older than everyone in that group and at 15 and 16 years, that's a big age difference, and that's one of the things we spoke about in the enrolment interview with her: how are you going to feel going into a class full of 15-year-old boys and you're almost 17. She said: I'll get over it. Now she's like: I think I realise what that question was about now.

### **Multilingual TCKs**

A central issue named by participants was the token acknowledgment and respect given to the multilingual TCK student body. Accepting the reality of English or bilingual being the language of instruction in the international school content, the language support subject offered to multilingual TCKs not conversant in English, is English as an additional language (EAL). However, what appears to be missing is an understanding of cultural sensitivity in relation to the various languages that students' speak and not allowing segregation to occur in the playground and in class in terms of social groupings.

Teachers were conflicted with integrating TCKs or allowing them to work with their ethnicity of choice. Some teachers shared their struggle of stipulating what nationalities TCKs interact with. Inclusiveness arose as an important issue, along with subsequent rejection and exclusion of minority TCK students. This was perceived as a complex issue because language barriers hinder TCKs ability to integrate beyond seeking friendships with their own foreign language culture.

### **TCK Identity**

Staff in this study acknowledged that students of certain ages struggle with TCK identity issues. There's a clear recognition that,

when they're younger they're not grappling with the bigger questions like the older kids are, but that adolescents by their very nature, are trying to identify who they are, what they are, where they fit, and who's like them.

Findings in the study clearly showed that,

TCKs need that conversation and outlet.

As one teacher said,

we need the kids to be aware, to understand that they're not alone, and to celebrate that.

In terms of professional development, more formal education is required to inform teachers, TCKs and their parents, about lifespan identity issues, specifically in reality to TCKs. Some teachers addressed it based on personal and private experiences (as the parents of TCKs or being an adult TCK themselves), some staff were sufficiently knowledgeable to refer TCKs to the school counsellor, and others relied on logic and common sense, as the following teachers explain:

I can think of one boy in year 5 who has been to six different countries, six different schools ... the concern is when kids don't know what country they're from, or where they were born. And that has a big impact on who they are, and their self-esteem, and where they're headed. Often there is a lot of work to do with kids. Let's find out where you were born, let's have a look where you have been, let's have a look at your family system and the roots, your family tree, and that sort of thing and see if we can work out an identity for you.

At the beginning of the year we do the usual thing: where does everyone come from, and you get their pictures and you put it on the map, and the parents will come in for the parent/teacher, meet the teacher, and they'll be stunned because their kids are saying, "I'm Singaporean, I'm from Singapore, right, because I was born here?" But they're English and it's like, hey, if that's what they are identifying with at this point in time let it be, encourage it, enrich it. I wouldn't jump on it and say, "You're not Singaporean, you're actually British".

A few staff indicated that one avenue of supporting TCKs with identity challenges is through the IB learner profile, and in particular, the international mindedness attribute. However, as the following teacher explains, there can be ongoing problems when the adoption of the international mindedness attribute is lagging:

International mindedness [is] the only learner profile that will establish all of these things we're talking about with TCKs. But without school context, without that vision and understanding, we will always come up against hurdles every time we look at this concept. It's very, very slow moving. It was evident throughout all of our evaluations and our authorisation processes, that that's something that we struggle with. The cost of [not doing] it is the identity crisis.

### **Repatriation and Re-assignment**

A consistent issue for international school teachers is the high mobility of students in and out of the school system, "*a revolving door*" as one teacher put it. Repatriation or re-assignment to another location was found to be a major source of stress because teachers often felt ill-equipped to prepare TCKs, the class and themselves for the loss and grief that accompanies the regularity of students transitioning out of their international school. As one teacher explained:

I don't think we do it [well] at all. It's like, 'you're leaving? Bye'.

Another said:

Some [students] find out that they're going home last minute – it's 'Miss, I'm leaving on Friday, let's go party' and then they're gone.

More professional development is needed to support and empower teachers to respond effectively to the grief and loss experienced by TCKs for the class/year level, themselves and the parent group, as evidenced by the following incident:

I had a situation last term where a year 6 girl went home to South Africa, and the rest of her class were inconsolable. They were howling, seriously, for the next couple of days. The girl who was leaving wasn't upset, but the kids here were because she was moving on. About three quarters of that class had been in Singapore for a while and there were a couple of kids who had only just met her this year, but it was a big thing and the co-ordinators had to come in and have a chat to these kids and try and calm them down. It was a big issue and very, very unsettling for the kids who were still here.

For many staff, preparation for TCKs' leaving was considered a significant gap, and the question frequently arose,

in the wider sense of what we do, what are our duties in terms of preparing them to transition home?  
Is it our responsibility?

Acknowledging the role teachers' play in supporting the holistic development of TCKs, some staff voiced their opinion that,

we have to be realistic as to how we are supposed to prepare students to move back. I think ultimately the problems are the responsibility of the parents.

## DISCUSSION

On the whole, findings in the study point to a level of overall professional development training in relation to TCKs that seems to disappoint school teachers and staff at an international school in Singapore. The reality is that virtually no professional development training is provided specific to the international context in which teachers are employed. While ad-hoc and informal professional development was accessed consistently by staff to address the needs of TCKs in their care, more formal and specialized training is desired, and needed. Confirming some aspects of prior research (e.g. Holderness, 2001; Hayden, 2002), the issues that were unsuccessfully addressed included staff induction to TCKs in an international school context, TCK transitions, identity lifespan and cultural issues, multilingual TCKs, pastoral care, and international mindedness curriculum education.

On a more positive note, findings from the study provide an interesting perspective on professional development for international school teachers, which emerges as multifaceted and uniquely specialized in comparison to teachers in domestic school settings. Following Hayden's (2002) line of thinking, a four-stage model of professional development is proposed as necessary in order to equip international school teachers to effectively manage TCKs in the classroom: (1) initial staff induction and TCK professional development; (2) continuing and ongoing TCK professional development; (3) building teachers' capacities and competencies in responding to the holistic needs of TCKs in the classroom; and, (4) formal qualifications at the post graduate level for international school teachers employed in international schools, as well as those in administrative, head, and strategic roles.

Specialised professional development in relation to TCKs is necessary because the international school setting is perceived as a more complex and demanding environment for teachers, academically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically, due to the cultural context and the high degree of mobility inherent in international communities. But there is another reason to consider: findings show that many international school teachers and staff are passionate and deeply committed to their profession and the international context of their work, along with a profound understanding as to the challenges they and TCKs face, as explained by the following comment:

There are lots of pitfalls obviously moving countries a lot, and it's hard finding the right way to teach these kids sometimes, and it's hard for kids to transition. But some of the most fabulous, spectacular and amazing kids have been the ones who have moved to a lot of different countries ... they have got such an amazing wealth of experience ... they are so resilient ... and they're really, really vibrant and interesting people.

Furthermore, many staff suggested that they intend to remain overseas and to continue working in international schools with TCKs for quite some time, as this participant suggests:

Teachers go overseas, they work for ten years overseas and then they go back and they work in that small state school somewhere and they just go, "these kids are so boring, I've got to get out of this place".

As such, enhancing international school teachers capacity and competencies to manage TCKs more effectively seems both appropriate and necessary.

## Implications

The theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory guides the professional development focus for international school teachers working with TCKs. It also sets the direction for action at the family, educational administration, and support staff levels in the international school setting. This theory locates the individual at the centre of the bio-ecological system, in this case the

international school where teachers working with TCKs in the classroom are situated. What happens at each level of the five interconnected systems influences the quality of professionalism the international school teacher emanates when working with TCKs in their classroom.

Bronfenbrenner classified the ecological system as comprising five discrete yet interconnected nested subsystems that interact with the developing person's own professional and personal development. These organized subsystems, representing different contexts in society, are classified as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (see Table 1). The developing international school teacher is positioned at the centre of the ecological system. International school teachers may be active in one system or may never have entered that system, but the environmental events in each of the systems influences and reinforces what happens or does not happen in the developing professional's schema. In other words, what occurs in terms of TCK professional development (i.e. the quality, depth, frequency and duration of sessions) influences the capacity of the international school teacher to respond to the needs of individual TCKs.

**Table 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System of Subsystems**

<b>Sub-system</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>microsystem</b>	represents the international school teachers' everyday immediate environment in the host country in which they live and work. It refers to the most direct agents of social change that influence their paradigms, principles, beliefs and values. It includes interactions and relations with TCKs and their immediate families, education administration personnel, colleagues, employers, and friends
<b>mesosystem</b>	represents the interconnection of various microsystems, linking with direct change agents in the teachers' micro subsystem. It may include links between TCKs and their families, TCKs within the class and school environment, and education administrators
<b>exosystem</b>	signifies the layer in society in which the international school teacher is external and indirectly involved. Events in this system have the potential to interact and influence the teachers' microsystem. Community engagement and education, digital technology, and mass media are agents of change located at this level
<b>macrosystem</b>	denotes the overarching cultural ideologies and attitudes of the national, political, and economic systems. How is the international school teacher affected by living in the host country and teaching TCKs in the international school? This system underpins and influences all subsystems
<b>chronosystem</b>	provides an historical time dimension, representing events occurring over time that have shaped the growth and development of the environment in which the international school teacher lives (e.g., employment, place of residence, socioeconomic status, and family structure)

On a practical level, teaching staff expressed an overwhelming need for more discerning and sophisticated induction programs for themselves as well as TCKs. Also needed is formalized training to imbue the TCK phenomenon into the curriculum and pedagogy, using the international mindedness attribute as a foundational construct. Additionally, there is frustration at the lack of pastoral care and counseling that is available to staff to support TCKs as well as themselves to cope with the high mobility and transitional nature that is an inherent part of the international school context. The following processes and strategies are recommended as part of the mesosystem, recognizing that what happens in one system impacts the other systems.

First, when a school represents a national curriculum (such as the school in this study), diversity among staff is critical to ensure a broader representation of nationalities and cultures on the teaching staff beyond the school's home-country culture. This will likely include employing local staff in the host-country, which is a common feature in many international schools in Singapore. Diversity among staff is necessary at all staffing levels, including teaching, administration, para-professional, welfare, counselling, and learning support. Doing so can help with developing 'international mindedness' so that children can be taught differently, and beyond only, the national curriculum of the home-country. People from different backgrounds who work together, engage and communicate with one another also demonstrate inclusiveness as an important international competency.

Second, most staff identified that in order to competently support TCKs to cope and adapt within the international school setting, parents of TCKs also require ongoing support specific to parenting TCKs given that, in their view,

parents have got no idea.

While staff recognise that their client per se is the student, they are nonetheless aware that spillover of issues from home to school is a reality, thus, on the basis that,

you've got to sort yourself out before you're any help to the child,

parental support is seen as critical to ensure better adjusted children. What is needed is a partnership between the school, the teacher and the family at home. In this study, parental support is currently undertaken by teachers on an individual basis, as well as by counsellors if the child has been referred. However, what seems important is a formal and more systematic approach in the form of curriculum training, as well as general training about life with TCKs.

A further critical aspect is clear and supportive communication between parents, TCKs and school staff in relation to the students welfare and other significant events in their lives, be it daily routine events (e.g. absence of one or both parents), or one-off more specific and unique events (e.g. repatriation, re-assignment, a family death, or grandparent visits). This skilled communication with families from multicultural backgrounds is not counseling but rather as teacher communication. Ideally, teachers need to develop their capacity as culturally competent communicators. Hence, communication training is key, as the following teacher suggests:

If a teacher can be told, kept in communication, when dad goes away or when mum goes away, and when they're back, that's when you can see patterns in the children's behaviour, not only mood swings but even down to their work sometimes makes a very big difference. That's where the gap exists, because these kids have been ripped away from grandparents and all that support, cousins, and so on. It does have a huge bearing.

Pastoral care for TCKs is critical. Findings show that one important area to focus on for TCKs is to allow them space and time to simply share and talk about their TCK experiences in a non-judgmental environment. This can be led by TCKs themselves or facilitated on a more formal basis by counselors and welfare staff. Another suggestion is to create a newcomer's club for TCKs perhaps as an informal part of the induction program. Whose jurisdiction this may fall within would need to be decided and agreed upon.

It was evident throughout the study that staff identify the school as having responsibility to provide them with relevant in-depth professional development to help them to support, understand, respond to, and engage with TCKs. This professional development needs to be ongoing, transparent, and aimed at building their capacity as staff working within an international school context. This intervention would target and involve the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem of the Bronfenbrenner model. Interactions between these subsystems will significantly influence and build the capacity of the international school teacher working with TCKs.

## Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study has several limitations. First, it is focused on one English speaking school in Singapore which subsequently limits the generalizability of the findings to other international schools both in Singapore and in the Asia region, noting that there would likely be cultural and language differences among other countries in Asia (e.g. international schools in China, Hong Kong). The study is also limited to an international school of one national curriculum, thereby restricting the findings to the perceptions of international school staff in the context of one country. Yet, although focus group data provide only a single-rater response, validity and reliability concerns were addressed to some extent by using an inter-rater procedure to check for accuracy of the data collected and to limit researcher bias.

To address these limitations, future research would ideally investigate a range of schools in different locations in Asia in order to adopt a broader perspective on international school teachers professional development in relation to TCKs, which this paper does not directly consider. Replication of the exploratory study would likely provide important data from which comparisons could be drawn across different national curriculums, as well as across cultures and international communities. Future research might also consider obtaining the views of parents who, in the international school context, are important stakeholders in the overall well-being and 'life' of the international school community. Additionally, parents may bring considerable knowledge as to the specific needs of their TCK children in the international school classroom.

## CONCLUSION

This study was intended to extend understanding of the professional development needs of international school teachers in response to the needs of TCKs. The contribution is threefold. First, it demonstrates that formal professional development for international school staff is lacking, wherein staff predominantly rely on informal, ad-hoc and on-the-job training to acquire competencies that equip them to work with TCK issues in the classroom.

A second contribution is that the study moves empirical research on international schools beyond only a focus on recruitment and retention, to consider the professional development needs of staff as a necessary component of ongoing employment. Importantly, the focus on continuous training and the building of a core set of international skills and competencies pertaining to TCKs may in turn have implications for international school staff recruitment and retention. Additionally, the study extends the focus of professional development for international school teachers beyond only induction training within schools, to consider other types of professional development which can be provided both internally as well as externally throughout the contracted period of employment, including the attainment of formal qualifications at the post-graduate level.

A third contribution is that the study highlights professional development in relation to TCKs as an important gap in international school teachers' capacity building, and one which they would like to see addressed. The findings therefore constitute an incremental but important step towards understanding how professional development in the international school context can support staff to acquire a specialised skillset to effectively cater for the specific needs of TCKs. In doing so, the TCK phenomenon can be more specifically reflected in the curriculum to become part of the culture of the international school community, which will ultimately enhance the overall wellbeing and wholeness of TCKs in the international school context.

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## KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

**Capacity building:** Enhancing and expanding existing knowledge, skills, competencies, and capabilities. Agency is an important element of capacity building, meaning that teachers are active in their own professional development.

**Collegial reflective dialogue:** Purposeful and effective engagement in reflective thinking with others. Reflective thinking influences reflective practice, an integral part of analysing and evaluating professional action. Learning thus occurs through constructing knowledge in shared social communication with others.

**Constructivist approach:** Persons deepening their knowledge and understanding by participating in shared discourse with others. Persons construct their knowledge through the transformation of experiences, linking new knowledge with existing knowledge. The learning takes place through the activity of the learner.

**Expatriate:** An employee of an organization who voluntarily chooses to be sent from their country of origin and/or permanent residence to a foreign country to work temporarily but does not take up citizenship of that country.

**Focus group:** A qualitative research method in which an interactive group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about a particular topic.

**Home-country:** Country of origin from where an expatriate has been recruited prior to undertaking an international assignment.

**Host-country:** Country to which an expatriate is temporarily assigned, but for which they do not usually have citizenship.

**International Baccalaureate (IB):** An international education foundation headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland that offers four educational programs for children aged 3–19. "IB" can refer to the organization itself, any of the four programs, or the diploma or certificates awarded at the end of the diploma program.

**International assignment:** The project or temporary role in another country to which an expatriate is dispatched by his or her employing organization in service of corporate goals, typically for a period of 1 to 5 years.

**International labour market:** An informal employment market that exists globally to meet the supply and demand of talent for multinational corporations.

**International school:** A school that is independent of any national system of education and offers a curriculum that is different from that in the host country. The curriculum focuses on international education, while responding to requirements of the host country's Ministry of Education. The school is usually, but not always, located overseas from a student's country of citizenship. There is a multinational and multilingual student body, with English or bilingual being the language of instruction. Some international schools have local students from the host country whose parents pay high tuition fees so their children have exposure to an international education, learn in the language of the international school, and obtain qualifications necessary for applying for higher education studies overseas. Priority is given to developing an 'international mindedness' among its students.

**International school teacher:** A qualified and suitable person employed in an international school, who is a registered teacher.

**Inter-rater reliability:** A statistical term relating to the degree of agreement among raters, providing a score of how much consensus there is in the ratings given by each rater.

**Learner Profile:** At the centre of the IB program is the "learner profile", which defines the type of students the program is intended to develop, e.g., global citizens that are caring, balanced, open-minded, knowledgeable, communicative, risk-taking, principled, reflective, inquiring, and thinker.

**NVIVO:** A qualitative analysis software program.

**Pastoral Care:** Looking after the emotional, personal and social wellbeing of children or students (and their parents) including emotional wellbeing, health, social and moral education, and behavior development.

**Pedagogy:** Linking the science and art of education, pedagogy combines the subject matter and the content being taught, with the method of teaching this content in such a way that engages students in the learning process.

**Professional development:** Authentic participation in professional learning sessions including training, reading, dialoguing, experimenting, reflecting, and collaborative activities, which can be both formally delivered and informally experienced as on-the-job work integrated learning.

**Reflective action:** Reflecting on, constructing and integrating new knowledge within the context of existing knowledge, to build on and from experiences, and to be actively engaged in developing theories that can be used in practice.

**Re-assignment:** An international assignment that is undertaken at the immediate conclusion of a prior international assignment without an intervening period of repatriation.

**Repatriation:** The reintegration of an expatriate into their original home operation/country from where they undertook their (first or only) international assignment.

**Third culture kids:** The children of parents who live in a foreign country for their work.

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