

MISSIONARY KIDS IN MINISTRY

By D. U. S.

November 2007

(Formatting and page numbers changed in March 2018)

Posted on <http://www.pilgrimsforjesus.com/>

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Abstract

People who grew up with missionary parents are different from those whose parents led more traditional lives. These “missionary kids” tend to share certain characteristics, due to having lived in multiple cultures, having experienced the Christian faith in a deep way, and having moved repeatedly. The author suggests that these traits can be particularly useful in missions, in other cross-cultural or service-related work, and in helping expand the worldviews of others.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
MK Traits	2
Traits Resulting from Cross-Cultural Experiences	3
Traits Resulting from Christian Influences	5
Traits Resulting from High Mobility	6
Opportunities for Service.....	8
Missions-Related Ministries	8
Other Cross-Cultural Opportunities	10
Effecting Worldview Changes	12
Other Service-Related Opportunities.....	14
Conclusion.....	15
Bibliography	18

Introduction

Each person has specific personality traits, interests, talents, etc. As Christians, we don't believe that we have these characteristics by chance. Instead, we believe that we are God's wonderful creation (Psalm 139). We agree with the apostle Paul, who, in a discussion of spiritual gifts, said, "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians 12:18). This special arrangement was made "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).¹ We also know that God can even use our experiences, both good and bad, for his purposes.²

Those who grew up with missionary parents,³ like other believers,⁴ can and should use their particular traits to serve God. However, to do so effectively, these "missionary kids," or "MKs,"⁵ should know what their skills and characteristics are. While there are some types of traits—such as personality and intelligence—that people are born with, other traits are influenced or produced by people's specific environments. The environments and experiences that have shaped MKs vary greatly. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities among the formative experiences and resulting traits of most MKs. In this paper I will attempt to identify

¹ One might even argue that we were created with all our specific traits—not just spiritual gifts—to fit the particular works ordained for us, or that God ordained particular works for us based on how He made us. For example, Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do," though the context does not elaborate on this statement.

² E.g., confer Romans 8:28 and Genesis 50:20.

³ For the purposes of this paper, we will define missionaries as people who work in a culture other than their own for the sake of the gospel.

⁴ It is clear that not all sons and daughters of missionaries become Christians, and even some of those who do may struggle with their faith for a while. However, the discussion of those who don't have a firm faith is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵ The term "missionary kid" doesn't indicate a person's life stage, but rather his/her parents' occupation during at least part of that person's developmental years. In this paper the term will be used to refer specifically to adults, unless the context indicates otherwise.

some of the most effective ways in which the combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions shared by most missionary kids can be used in the service of God's kingdom. This paper is both descriptive and implicitly prescriptive (or, better, "suggestive") and will hopefully prove helpful both to MKs and to those who regularly interact with them. I will first discuss the traits MKs usually acquire as a result of the main themes in the experiences of most MKs. Afterward I will give some conjectures about ways in which these traits can be used effectively in formal and informal ministry, along with a few suggestions for MKs in ministry. Citing research about some types of careers that MKs have actually been involved in will further enhance the picture of what MKs might be well suited for.

MK Traits

I would like to describe some of the main characteristics shared by many missionary kids. I will focus on the traits of psychologically healthy MKs who have had some time to adjust to their "passport culture"⁶ (as well as is possible for most MKs) and who are comfortable with themselves.⁷ The main influences that help shape MKs can be divided into three categories: cross-cultural experiences, Christian influences, and high mobility.⁸ Each of these categories of

⁶ This term is taken from David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up among Worlds* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1999), 88. An MK's "passport culture" refers to the culture of the MK's parents, which is usually the main culture in the country in which the MK holds a passport.

⁷ There are also patterns of "reverse culture shock" or temporary identity crisis experienced by many MKs, and some MKs develop long-term negative psychological patterns. However, these topics are beyond the scope of this paper and are described in detail in other sources.

⁸ See David C. Pollock, "Being a Third-Culture Kid: A Profile," in *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, ed. Joyce M. Bowers (Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 49. The first two influences are by definition part of missionary service. The last influence is typical in the experiences of many MKs (especially ones whose parents come from wealthier countries) in recent missions history, but is more accidental or functional and has not necessarily been shared by missionary kids everywhere throughout history.

influences tends to produce certain types of traits in MKs.⁹ Naturally, there are always MKs who represent exceptions to these patterns, so I will not usually state that explicitly.

Traits Resulting from Cross-Cultural Experiences

Missionary kids have been shaped in very significant ways by their cross-cultural experiences. MKs have had significant exposure to their “host culture(s),” i.e., the culture(s) in which their family was doing missionary work. A study by Ann Cottrell of U.S. adult “third culture kids,” or TCKs (a superset of MKs), was recently published. Since that work will be referenced repeatedly, it is important to note that the study only surveyed TCKs who were not living in other countries at the time,¹⁰ and is thus not representative of all TCKs. Cottrell found that “the great majority (85%) were abroad 10 years or more.” 72% of MKs had “lived in only one country,”¹¹ other than the U.S., in which they may or may not have lived during their developmental years. MKs have also had exposure to their passport culture through their parents, visits to the passport country, perhaps a period of actually living in the passport country, interaction with missions team or boarding school members, and various media (books, movies, CDs, etc.). Eventually most MKs return to their passport country, at least for a while.

⁹ It is clear that none of these types of influences, by themselves, are unique to MKs. Immigrant families share some cross-cultural influences. Non-MK “third-culture kids” (sons or daughters of military personnel, international businesspeople, Foreign Service personnel, and others) generally share most of these characteristics, though the religious influences are usually absent or less central. Missionaries, of course, share most of the experiences with MKs (they may not have some experiences, such as boarding school). However, since missionaries have these experiences after their developmental years, their identities are not influenced by the experiences in the same way as the MKs’ identities are. The various experiences are more part of *what missionaries do*, rather than *who they are* (or perceive themselves to be).

¹⁰ Ann Baker Cottrell, “Educational and Occupational Choices of American Adult Third Culture Kids,” in *Military Brats and Other Global Nomads*, ed. Morton G. Endor (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 230.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

The above influences tend to produce certain culture-related traits in MKs. The Lausanne Committee's Willowbank Report gives the following definition for culture:

Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of institutions which express these beliefs, values, and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.¹²

At the surface level, missionary kids have acquired some of the customs of each of the cultures that have influenced them.¹³ MKs can interact naturally with people from different cultures without breaking major social rules and are sometimes even temporarily mistaken for natives, especially if their physical features don't give them away.¹⁴ One of the most obvious skills MKs have acquired, and perhaps the only "technical" that can be defined as an MK trait, is linguistic ability. Most MKs are proficient in their passport language(s), in the language(s) of one or more host cultures, and perhaps in the common language of the missionary team, if different from the passport language. Having learned multiple languages as a child also makes it easier for MKs to learn additional languages.¹⁵

More fundamental than the customs are the values that MKs have encountered and sometimes assimilated. For example, different cultures have different views of the relative importance and proper roles of relationships, money, time, etc. MKs may also have developed their own values based on their experiences in the various culture(s). For example, MKs who

¹² Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "The Willowbank Report," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 484-5.

¹³ Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

have frequently seen poverty, and perhaps have compared it to their own relative prosperity,¹⁶ may have started valuing charity.

MKs may have also picked up some of the basic beliefs, i.e., the “worldview,” of their host culture(s), while remaining strongly influenced by a biblical worldview. Regarding culture in general, it should be noted that while MKs can often adapt their behavior to fit the culture they are currently in, they don’t usually form their personal cultural identity from any single culture they have experienced, but from parts of each.¹⁷ Having experienced multiple cultural contexts may also give MKs more tolerance for, and often appreciation of, people from diverse backgrounds.¹⁸

Traits Resulting from Christian Influences

Missionary kids have also been strongly influenced, directly and indirectly, by their parents’ faith, which is the primary motivator for being on the mission field. MKs tend to have strong Christian values. They have a concern for world evangelization and a desire to help others¹⁹ and see themselves as being part of something greater than themselves. Furthermore, MKs tend to have broader understandings of religious concepts. They have seen God at work

¹⁶ For a description of the vast difference in finances and possessions between missionary families and most of the people in the host culture, see Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money*, revised and expanded edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

¹⁷ See Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 19. MKs may, perhaps unknowingly, display conflicting values, which they choose between based on the cultural context or the specific situation. Sometimes MKs can’t choose which of two or more conflicting principles to act on and thus behave irrationally.

¹⁸ See *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁹ David L. Wickstrom, “Making Career Choices,” in *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, ed. Joyce M. Bowers (Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 134-5.

frequently and in amazing ways, e.g., in conversions, miracles, and social transformations.²⁰ They also perceive the church as being truly worldwide, with the various parts often cooperating in remarkable ways. MKs have witnessed diverse forms of worship and various scriptural interpretations and emphases. This is especially true for MKs who were part of international or interdenominational teams. MKs have also observed other religion(s) (or, more rarely, lack of religion) and their interaction with Christianity.

Traits Resulting from High Mobility

The high mobility that is a part of the lifestyle of most missionary families²¹ has also deeply affected the characteristics of missionary kids. MKs may have made significant relocations when first moving to their host culture, starting or returning from boarding school sessions or extended visits to the passport country, switching mission fields, and moving “back” to the passport country. One result of these frequent relocations is that MKs are generally quite flexible and can adapt well, both to the immediate situation and to long-term changes. MKs are able to observe carefully,²² learn the expected behavior, and blend in.²³ They are also resourceful,²⁴ i.e., “able to deal skillfully and promptly with new situations, difficulties, etc.”²⁵ Furthermore, MKs may make decisions quickly, realizing that opportunities may not last long.²⁶

²⁰ See David C. Pollock, “Being a Third-Culture Kid: A Profile,” in *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*, ed. Pam Echerd and Alice Arathoon (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, William Carey Library Division, 1989), 247.

²¹ Some people engage in missions activities by reaching out to people of other cultures around them and thus don’t have to relocate.

²² Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 110-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 92-3.

²⁴ Ted Ward, “The MK’s Advantage: Three Cultural Contexts,” in *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, ed. Joyce M. Bowers (Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 63.

The relationship patterns of MKs have also been significantly affected by high mobility. Since most MKs didn't see their extended family very often while growing up, and during boarding school only rarely saw their parents, MKs made close friends and may have treated them as family.²⁷ However, MKs frequently moved away from their friends or had their MK friends move away. Since time for relationships was short, MKs, having acquired significant social skills through their experiences,²⁸ may have learned to quickly build relationships and move past the more superficial stages of relationships.²⁹

There is one more set of characteristics that I will describe. While these characteristics are not viewed as advantageous in most circumstances, they affect the majority of MKs to some degree and thus play a role in ministry selection. MKs have a different sense of belonging than monocultural people. As a result of having made repeated geographical and cultural transitions, MKs usually feel some sense of rootlessness.³⁰ That is, they cannot fully identify with any single culture, or call any single location "home." Even if they do strongly prefer a particular location, there may be circumstances preventing them from living there. However, MKs usually find that they share many abstract traits, such as those related to culture or mobility mentioned in this paper, with other third-culture kids. Thus, MKs feel a sense of

²⁵ resourceful. Dictionary.com, *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*, Random House, Inc., <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/resourceful> (accessed: November 18, 2007).

²⁶ Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 100-1. Conversely, as Pollock describes, MKs who have repeatedly found that it was ultimately somebody else's (e.g., their parents' or mission agency's) choice that determined what happened to them may have become hesitant to make a decision at all, or even to express their desire to do one thing rather than another.

²⁷ See Ward, "MK's Advantage," 68.

²⁸ Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 112-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131-8. Pollock also says that, in an attempt to protect against the pain of repeated loss, MKs sometimes limit the depth of their relationships or start prematurely letting a relationship go voluntarily when they sense it might be severed soon (for whatever reason).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

belonging not primarily or not solely to a particular location, but to that somewhat abstract category of people.³¹ As a result of a pattern of transition, and perhaps also due to a desire to finally find “home,” MKs may also feel restless.³² That is, they may periodically, perhaps in chronological cycles corresponding to those of the MKs’ developmental years, instinctively expect or seek a change of location or environment (such as culture, job, and sometimes even relationships).

Opportunities for Service

Missions-Related Ministries

It is natural that some of the ministries missionary kids are particularly well-suited for are ones related specifically to missions. The most obvious of these ministries is long-term missionary work, for which MKs are well prepared due to their faith and values, cross-cultural skills, and adaptability. Interestingly, many MKs don’t return to the field long-term, whether because they have had enough transitions, or for some other reason. Buffam states: “The ratio of MKs returning to the field is considerably below what one versed in missions would expect. For those who do return the attrition rate is remarkably below the average of all workers.”³³ An article in *Worldwide Challenge* mentions research indicating that 15-20% of MKs do return to the field.³⁴ This percentage, while representing a minority of MKs, is hundreds of times greater than the percentage of cross-cultural missionaries from the general population of Christian

³¹ Ibid., 19.

³² Ibid., 125.

³³ C. John Buffam, *The Life and Times of an MK* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1985), 175.

³⁴ Dawn Sundstrom, “For the Sake of the Call: International missions can’t succeed without healthy missionary kids,” *Worldwide Challenge*, volume 24, number 3 (1997), <http://www.wwc magazine.org/1997/call.html>.

affiliates.³⁵ However, White warns that MKs should avoid returning to the mission field as missionaries for the wrong reasons, such as feeling comfortable there. MKs should thus not decide to return to the field until they are comfortable, from the aspect of cultural concerns, with staying in their passport country.³⁶ Clearly, there are numerous venues that MKs can use for missionary service. Especially noteworthy is teaching other MKs, either in boarding schools, or as a tutor on the field. In such conditions the teachers are able not only to deliver meaningful academic and spiritual content, but also to present healthy role models that the young MKs can strongly identify with and imitate.

Leading short-term trips is also an excellent opportunity for many missionary kids.³⁷ MKs would generally be skilled at trip promotion (which requires enthusiasm for the culture and the goals), teambuilding, briefing, directing logistical preparations, interacting with nationals and long-term missionaries (perhaps even interpreting), maintaining a spiritual focus, and otherwise leading the trip with flexibility. MKs would also be qualified to debrief team members, who might otherwise have very difficult transitions back to the passport country, especially if they had seen significant poverty, oppression, disease, etc.³⁸ This last task seems often to have been

³⁵ See Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster USA, 2001), 2-4. According to Johnstone, 0.02% of Protestant, Independent/Indigenous, and Anglican affiliates in the world were cross-cultural missionaries at the time of data gathering. Naturally, some people were going to be missionaries in the future, while some missionaries had already retired. Thus, this number should perhaps be multiplied by a small factor, e.g., 2-5 (based on the fraction of the average missionary's life that he/she spends as a cross-cultural missionary) in order to be compared to the percentage of MKs returning to the field.

³⁶ Fran White, "MK Identity Crisis: Fact or Fiction," in *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*, ed. Pam Echerd and Alice Arathoon (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, William Carey Library Division, 1989), 268-9.

³⁷ Some MKs have become opposed to short-term missions in principle, due to having observed trips with low quality goals, methods, or participants.

³⁸ Long-term missionaries would also be good at these tasks, but most of the enthusiastic missionaries young enough for most of the short-term team members to identify with would be on the field. (The short-term trip veterans of a church could also do a pretty good job, though their cultural adaptability and their language skills might not be as high as the MKs').

performed inadequately, if at all, by trip leaders. MKs would probably also avoid the main mistakes often made in short-term missions trips.

Even if missionary kids don't go into another culture themselves, they can still be of great help to the missionary enterprise. They can effectively provide long-term missionaries with material, logistical, communications, emotional, prayer, and other support.³⁹ MKs also have the motivation and skills to promote a general vision for missions and to recruit missionaries and people to support them. As part of this, MKs can join missions committees, speak in children's or adults' Sunday school classes, participate in various missions conferences, or informally talk with their friends. For such tasks it may be beneficial to MKs to take a missions class or read some books about missions to fill in some knowledge gaps.⁴⁰ MKs—especially ones who were on non-international teams and didn't attend international boarding schools—should also consider learning about cultures or regions of the world that they didn't personally come in contact with.

Other Cross-Cultural Opportunities

Missionary kids are also very well prepared for various other types of ministry and work involving cross-cultural aspects. Among these opportunities are internationally or cross-culturally oriented careers, both in and outside the MKs' passport countries, that have not traditionally been viewed as missions activities, but through which God can nevertheless be glorified. International NGOs, various branches of the government, large businesses, and other

³⁹ See Neal Pirolo, *Serving As Senders: How to Care for Your Missionaries While They Are Preparing to Go, While They Are on the Field, When They Return Home* (San Diego, CA: Emmaus Road International, 1991).

⁴⁰ While MKs know quite a bit about missions, they sometimes lack some basic knowledge about the subject. For example, they may not know which Bible passages, besides Matthew's "Great Commission" passage and perhaps a few others, relate to the topic of missions.

organizations would be well served by the cultural, social, and ethical skills and dispositions of MKs. However, thus far relatively few MKs have chosen to work for large organizations such as these.⁴¹

The MKs' linguistic ability in particular is very useful. MKs who speak two or more languages fluently or natively can become interpreters in various organizations or businesses.⁴² MKs may also be effective at translating written materials. The MKs' language-learning ability opens the possibility of translating materials from or into languages previously unknown to the MKs. One such ministry is Bible translation work, in which MKs can use not only their linguistic adeptness, but also their ability to live in another culture, adapt to simpler circumstances,⁴³ etc.

Missionary kids living in their passport countries can also effectively help others who in their everyday lives are dealing with multiple cultures. This includes those who are facing or have recently faced relocation, such as international students and TCKs, as well as those who have a more stable cross-cultural context, such as immigrants, members of ethnic minorities, refugees, people whose parents are from different races, and others who were significantly influenced by various cultures while growing up.⁴⁴ MKs can help these people better understand and process their experiences, identify with and learn from others with similar backgrounds, and find caring communities. In the process, the MKs can share their faith in a natural way. They may find that those they are ministering to are particularly responsive, since

⁴¹ Cottrell, *Educational and Occupational Choices*, 238-45.

⁴² See Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 114-5.

⁴³ William D. Taylor, "A TCP String of Five Pearls," in *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, ed. Joyce M. Bowers (Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 150.

⁴⁴ See Ruth E Van Reken and Paulette M. Bethel, "Third Culture Kids: Prototypes for Understanding Other Cross-Cultural Kids," *Home Page of Ruth Van Reken*, <http://www.crossculturalkid.org/cck.htm>.

moving to new locations often makes people more open to new relationships, and since transitions and hardships may contribute to a reconsideration of values, beliefs, etc.

Effecting Worldview Changes

Missionary kids can also make good use of their expanded worldview, which is perhaps the greatest trait they have gained through their experiences.⁴⁵ Recognizing that there are many ways to think about or do something (a concept postmodern people understand as a principle, without necessarily having specific examples), being able to draw upon specific examples of such diverse outlooks, and being able to critically and biblically evaluate particular views or behaviors⁴⁶ are all very valuable assets. MKs can thus serve others by helping them to acquire, at least to a certain degree, such a worldview.⁴⁷

MKs can communicate their worldview in many ways, both explicitly and implicitly, formally and informally. One of the explicit ways is through a formal teaching position. Schools, colleges, seminaries, Sunday school classes for children and for adults, seminars, etc. are among the settings in which such teaching can occur. In these settings, MKs will also be able to use the social skills they have developed through interacting with people from many different backgrounds and through repeatedly forming relationships. A further factor qualifying MKs for teaching and other specialized positions is that MKs are highly educated, which is demonstrated

⁴⁵ Pollock, "Being a TCK," in *Resilient MKs*, 52.

⁴⁶ See Ward, "MK's Advantage," 67.

⁴⁷ While missionaries have also had significant encounters with other cultures and worldviews, those perspectives may not have influenced them as deeply as they have influenced MKs. Foreigners and recent immigrants, on the other hand, have a very thorough perspective from a different culture, sometimes even from multiple cultures. However, monocultural people may be more likely to listen to and attempt to apply insights from the MKs—whom they consider to belong, at least to some degree, to their own culture—than insights from "outsiders."

in the study by Cottrell mentioned earlier. Describing the surveyed TCKs collectively, Cottrell says that “81% had at least a bachelor’s degree compared with 21% of the US population over 25 at the time. An astounding 11% of this sample had completed a doctoral level degree and more were in Ph.D. programs.”⁴⁸ The proposition that MKs are qualified for teaching positions is empirically supported by the fact that 25% of MKs were indeed found to be working in educational settings.⁴⁹

MKs can also communicate their worldview through writing. They are able to vividly portray what such an expanded worldview would entail,⁵⁰ while not neglecting to balance their descriptions with theory. There are also less formal ways MKs can communicate their worldview. I once read that TCKs often “play the devil’s advocate,” that is, they represent the unpopular position in an argument. I would further argue that often when there is no argument at all, especially in a monocultural group, MKs bring in a new perspective in an attempt to represent some of the opinions of the rest of the world.

Among the groups in which MKs can attempt to bring about an expanded worldview are churches in the MKs’ passport cultures. The missionary kids’ belief that the Bible can still be trusted and is truly the word of God and the belief that God is still very active in the world, answers prayer in powerful ways, and even works in manifestly supernatural ways (though it could be argued that anything God the Father does is by definition supernatural) are especially important for Western churches to hear. God’s value of unity in diversity is also important for a biblical worldview. MKs can help churches understand that there are various worship styles,

⁴⁸ Cottrell, *Educational and Occupational Choices*, 233. Further discussion in the chapter gives the impression that the educational level of the MKs in particular was above the average for the surveyed TCKs.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁰ Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 83-5.

theological viewpoints, and ways of living the Christian life that can each glorify God in a unique way and should not be homogenized. On the other hand, MKs can emphasize the importance of recognizing that believers from various cultures, races, social classes, etc. ultimately form one body, that we should not create unnecessary barriers to fellowship, that we have much to learn from each other, and that we can often benefit from working together for the common good.⁵¹

Other Service-Related Opportunities

On a broader scale, missionary kids tend to be best qualified for ministries and careers that are service-related. The MKs' social and cross-cultural skills, strong value of relationships, and desire to help others—all of which are fairly closely related to people—as well as valuable perspectives on the world can benefit the people that MKs interact with. The ability to adapt to and be resourceful in new environments is also generally more beneficial in service careers than it is in industry, where the specific technologies may change fairly often, but the environment is more stable. On the other hand, MKs share few, if any, technical skills besides language knowledge that are not also shared by their non-MK peers. In fact, MKs may have less knowledge about specific technologies, etc., since the traditional host countries frequently have less advanced or less widespread technology than the passport countries.⁵²

⁵¹ See Ward, "MK's Advantage," 69.

⁵² This is not to say that there aren't many MKs with high technical skills, or that jobs in industry are necessarily poor choices for MKs. However, MKs who choose solely activities with minimal people contact may be underutilizing a significant subset of their skills.

The literature shows that there is indeed a tendency to choose careers that involve interacting with and helping others.⁵³ Cottrell in particular confirms this: 25% of the MKs surveyed were in educational settings, as mentioned earlier; 24% were in health or social service; and 10% worked in religious settings. There were also quite a few MKs (33%) who were in business settings or self-employed. The remaining 8% worked for the government, the military, or non-medical professional firms or offices. Surprisingly, none of the 102 MKs surveyed were in the arts or the media.⁵⁴ We should note that the tendency of most MKs to choose such jobs supports, but does not logically imply, the proposition that there is an optimal skill match here.⁵⁵

Conclusion

In closing I will first review the main influences on and traits of most missionary kids, along with the types of service to God's kingdom that I have suggested. Then I will give a few general guidelines for the ministry involvement of MKs. As I have described, there are three categories of influences that significantly affect the traits of MKs. The first is the set of cross-cultural experiences, which makes MKs more aware of and appreciative of other ethnicities, customs, values, worldviews, etc., both in general and in particular. The second category of influence includes a family lifestyle and goals based on a strong Christian faith and biblical

⁵³ E.g., Taylor, "A TCP String of Five Pearls," 150. Also Steve Van Rooy, "Career Developments: Woodstock Class of 1968," in *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, ed. Joyce M. Bowers (Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 142.

⁵⁴ Cottrell, *Educational and Occupational Choices*, 238.

⁵⁵ Lack of knowledge of personal skills, or of available jobs and their required skills, as well pressure to choose certain types of jobs could contribute to suboptimal choices. E.g., Cottrell mentions limited diversity of role models as a factor influencing career choice of some MKs. *Ibid.*, 236.

values, along with an experience of how people from other cultural and denominational backgrounds live out their faith, and how God works among those peoples. This gives the MKs strong biblical values, along with an expanded view of God and His church. The last category of influence shared by MKs is high mobility, which makes them flexible and resourceful, rootless and restless, and very valuing of relationships. Due to these traits, MKs are well suited for missions-related involvement, other cross-cultural and linguistic work, activities that allow for the sharing of worldviews, and other service-related ministries and careers. We may recognize that many of the specific activities that MKs are particularly suited for relate to being a mediator or a “bridge” (or, to use a more modern term, an “interface”) between differing entities:⁵⁶ different languages, various churches, individuals of diverse cultures, and perhaps also individuals or groups that differ in other ways.

Finally, there are two guidelines that I believe are helpful for missionary kids to keep in mind as they engage in ministry. The first is that each MK, as a unique individual, needs to get to know him/herself. Some of the traits described may not apply to a particular MK. At the same time, that person will have many additional characteristics. Wickstrom states:

Research indicates that there are eight different factors which need to be considered in order to be most effective and content in the work we do. They are: abilities, skills, interests, personality and personal style, messages from family of origin, personal values, vision and goals, and stage of development in life. By accurately identifying these characteristics each person is better equipped to choose the particular niche into which to fit.⁵⁷

It is also important to note that while God generally uses people’s specific skills, interests, and other traits, these things do not in themselves constitute a calling.

⁵⁶ Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 107-10.

⁵⁷ Wickstrom, “Career Choices,” 132.

The second principle is the need for humility. MKs who have adjusted well to who they are and don't have serious psychological issues generally realize that in certain areas they have significant advantages over non-MKs. This can easily lead to arrogance, i.e., a sense of being better than others.⁵⁸ However, MKs need to realize that they have not only areas they are particularly good at, but also areas they are not as good at as other people. MKs need to identify their own limitations.⁵⁹ Furthermore, neither MKs nor non-MKs chose their traits themselves. Instead, they were ultimately given the traits by God for the purpose of building up the church and glorifying Him in other ways. MKs need to realize that they have much to learn from, as well as to offer to, people from their passport culture, or from any other culture for that matter. It may be helpful to apply to MKs some of the roles that Larsen uses in reference to missionaries.⁶⁰ Larsen suggests that missionaries have often been viewed by those in their host cultures as teachers, accusers, and sellers, i.e., people who are trying to forcefully transmit their ideas, values, and material ways. Larson suggests that missionaries should instead engage in a non-forceful give-and-take relationship, being simultaneously a story teller and a learner, as well as a trader. Similarly, missionary kids can fulfill their proper function in the body if they use their skills to support others and allow themselves to be supported in turn.

⁵⁸ Pollock, *TCK Experience*, 103-5. It can also lead to a sense that the concerns or activities of others are somewhat trivial and are not worth the MKs' involvement, resulting in the MKs' partial aloofness toward others.

⁵⁹ For example, an MK who feels restless and rootless is probably not the ideal candidate to be a pastor, since that position requires long-term commitment to a particular location, group of people, and position (as well as sincere identification with the people and their culture).

⁶⁰ Donald N. Larson, "The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Story Teller," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 438-43.

Bibliography

- Bonk, Jonathan J. *Missions and Money*. Revised and expanded edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.
- Buffam, C. John. *The Life and Times of an MK*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1985.
- Cottrell, Ann Baker. "ATCKs maintain global dimensions throughout their lives." *TCK World*. <http://www.tckworld.com/useem/art1.html> (accessed October 30, 2007).
- Cottrell, Ann Baker. "Educational and Occupational Choices of American Adult Third Culture Kids." In *Military Brats and Other Global Nomads*, edited by Morton G. Endor, 229-53. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002.
- Danielson, Edward E. *Missionary Kid – MK*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984.
- Johnstone, Patrick, and Jason Mandryk. *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster USA, 2001.
- Larson, Donald N. "The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Story Teller." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne, 438-43. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999. Originally published in *Missiology: An International Review* (April 1978).
- Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. "The Willowbank Report." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne, 483-506. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999. Report of a consultation on gospel and culture held at Willowbank, Somerset Bridge, Bermuda, January 6-13, 1978.
- Pirollo, Neal. *Serving As Senders: How to Care for Your Missionaries While They Are Preparing to Go, While They Are on the Field, When They Return Home*. San Diego, CA: Emmaus Road International, 1991.
- Pollock, David C. "Being a Third-Culture Kid: A Profile." In *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, edited by Joyce M. Bowers, 45-53. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.
- Pollock, David C. "Being a Third-Culture Kid: A Profile." In *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*, edited by Pam Echerd and Alice Arathoon, 241-252. Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, William Carey Library Division, 1989.

Pollock, David C., and Ruth E. Van Reken. *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up among Worlds*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1999.

Sundstrom, Dawn. "For the Sake of the Call: International missions can't succeed without healthy missionary kids." *Worldwide Challenge*, volume 24, number 3 (May/June 1997). <http://www.wwcmagazine.org/1997/call.html>.

Taylor, William D. "A TCP String of Five Pearls." In *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, edited by Joyce M. Bowers, 146-53. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.

Van Reken, Ruth E, and Paulette M. Bethel. "Third Culture Kids: Prototypes for Understanding Other Cross-Cultural Kids." *Home Page of Ruth Van Reken*. <http://www.crossculturalkid.org/cck.htm> (accessed November 4, 2007).

Van Rooy, Steve. "Career Developments: Woodstock Class of 1968." In *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, edited by Joyce M. Bowers, 141-5. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.

Ward, Ted. "The MK's Advantage: Three Cultural Contexts." In *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, edited by Joyce M. Bowers, 61-71. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.

White, Fran. "MK Identity Crisis: Fact or Fiction." In *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*, edited by Pam Echerd and Alice Arathoon, 253-69. Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, William Carey Library Division, 1989.

Wickstrom, David L. "Making Career Choices." In *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*, edited by Joyce M. Bowers, 130-140. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.