The experience of Third Culture Kids entering secondary education in Melbourne, Australia.

Timothy J. Martin
B.Ed (Secondary) (Melb), Post Grad Dip Ed Studies (Student Welfare) (Melb)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Student Welfare in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne

2003
# Contents

LIST OF DIAGRAMS ........................................................................................................... i

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY .................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... iv

1. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 THE ISSUE ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS ............................................................................. 1
   1.3 ASSUMPTIONS ..................................................................................................... 4
   1.4 LIMITATIONS ...................................................................................................... 5
   1.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY ............................................................................. 6

2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ......................................................................... 8
   2.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW ....................................................................................... 8
   2.2 CULTURAL IDENTITY ....................................................................................... 9
   2.3 ADOLESCENCE AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT .............................................. 10
   2.4 TRANSITION ..................................................................................................... 11
   2.5 CONNECTEDNESS, RESILIENCE AND ANONYMITY ....................................... 13
   2.6 TEACHERS, SCHOOLS AND THIRD CULTURE KIDS ....................................... 14

3. METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................... 16
   3.1 TYPE OF STUDY ............................................................................................... 16
   3.2 SOURCE OF DATA ............................................................................................. 18
      3.2.1 The setting .................................................................................................. 18
      3.2.2 The participants ....................................................................................... 19
      3.2.3 Sampling ................................................................................................... 19
   3.3 RESEARCH METHODS ...................................................................................... 20
      3.3.1 Interviews with Participants ..................................................................... 20
      3.3.2 Focus Group Interview ............................................................................ 22
   3.4 DATA COLLECTION TIMETABLE ..................................................................... 24
   3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RIGOUR .................................................................. 24
   3.6 DATA ANALYSIS .............................................................................................. 26
      3.6.1 Coding Data ............................................................................................... 26
      3.6.2 Grouping Data – identifying themes ......................................................... 27
   3.7 RELATIONSHIP TO THOSE BEING STUDIED ................................................. 29
   3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .......................................................................... 30

4. CASE STUDY SUMMARY ....................................................................................... 32
   4.1 MATTHEW ........................................................................................................... 32
   4.2 JAKE .................................................................................................................. 33
   4.3 BEN .................................................................................................................... 35
   4.4 SARAH ................................................................................................................. 36
   4.5 RACHEL ............................................................................................................... 38
# Contents

5. FINDINGS .............................................................................................................. 40

5.1 INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................... 40
5.2 THE TRANSITION ................................................................................................. 41
  5.2.1 Leaving: Pre-departure .............................................................................. 41
  5.2.1.1 Thoughts about coming / returning to Australia .................................. 41
  5.2.1.2 What happened prior to departure? ...................................................... 43
  5.2.2 Entering: Arrival in Australia ..................................................................... 44
  5.2.2.1 Initial contact with the school in Melbourne ....................................... 45
  5.2.2.2 The first days at school in Melbourne .................................................. 45
  5.2.2.3 School Uniform .................................................................................... 47
  5.2.2.4 Expectations ......................................................................................... 48
  5.2.3 Re-involvelement .......................................................................................... 49
  5.2.3.2 Coming “Home” Is Hard! .................................................................... 49
  5.2.3.2.1 How long does it take to “adjust”? ............................................... 49
  5.2.3.2.2 Deciding Factors. .......................................................................... 51
  5.2.3.2.3 Importance of the family.............................................................. 53
5.3 CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CONNECTEDNESS ........................................................ 54
  5.3.1 Cultural Identity .......................................................................................... 54
  5.3.2 Connectedness ............................................................................................. 55
  5.3.2.1 Friendship groups and making connections......................................... 55
  5.3.2.2 Support of other TCKs......................................................................... 56
  5.3.2.3 Interaction with Teachers................................................................. 58
  5.3.2.4 Sharing life story with others. .............................................................. 59
  5.3.2.5 No one really understands my experience ........................................... 61
  5.3.2.6 Individuality and Anonymity – the importance of not being seen to be different ........................................................................................................... 63
  5.3.3 Hidden Immigrants ..................................................................................... 63
5.4 ADOLESCENCE AND THE BEST TIME TO MOVE .................................................... 64
5.5 SCHOOL COMPARISON ......................................................................................... 65
5.6 SUGGESTIONS TO HELP MAKE THE TRANSITION SMOOTHER ....................... 68
5.7 SPECIFIC TRANSITION PROGRAM ...................................................................... 69
  5.7.1 Initial response............................................................................................ 69
  5.7.2 Mentor ......................................................................................................... 70
  5.7.3 Small group ................................................................................................. 71
5.8 THE POSITIVES OF BEING A THIRD CULTURE KID ............................................... 72
5.9 IMPACT OF TCK EXPERIENCE ON TERTIARY STUDY AND CAREER CHOICES ...... 74
5.10 REFLECTIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY .............................................. 75

6. SUMMARY ............................................................................................................ 77

APPENDICES ............................................................................................................ 83

APPENDIX A: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE (PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT) ........ 83
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM .............................................................. 85
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................. 86
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ............................... 88

BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................................................................................... 89
LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1: Outline of the Focus Group Interview ........................................ 23

Diagram 2: Data Collection Timetable .......................................................... 24

Diagram 3: Matrix (Semi-Fixed Grid) to Record Some of the Themes
From the One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews ......................... 28
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for any other
degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis
contains no material previously published or written by any other person,
except where due reference is given in the text.

Signature: ___________________
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by each of the participants as they reflected on very important aspects of their lives. The researcher would also like to acknowledge the support and guidance of his supervisor, Ms Desma Strong, as well as the assistance of his very special proofreaders.
ABSTRACT

The term Third Culture Kids (TCKs) was first used by the sociologist Ruth Hill Useem in 1976 to describe children of diplomats, missionaries, business people and military personnel who have lived outside their native country for periods of time. The literature suggests that transition concerns for TCKs have not always been recognised or taken seriously, and that the transition process can be traumatic. The identification of significant needs for TCKs is an essential initial step in addressing the sources of trauma associated with re-entering the Australian classroom following time spent overseas.

This study focuses on the identification of those significant needs. Six TCKs were approached, and five agreed to participate in this study. All of the participants completed their secondary education at the same school, in outer eastern Melbourne, in either 2000 or 2001. This qualitative study consisted of one on one semi structured interviews with the five participants, followed by a focus group interview involving four of the participants.

A key issue identified by the participants during their transition was the desire to be treated as individuals who do not wish to appear different from their peers. The study also identified the importance of supporting the TCKs during their transition, primarily through access to a mentor. The establishment of small groups consisting of other TCKs was also identified as helpful. The main factor that influenced the length of the adjustment period was the time taken to
make a personal decision to accept the change of circumstances and move on. This process took anywhere between six months and three years.

Each of the participants displayed an amazing ability to rebound from the lows. Their resilience, aided by strong support from family, other TCKs and peers, is evident in their unanimous view that being a TCK is a very positive experience.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Issue

Over the past eight years the researcher has worked with Third Culture Kids during their transition back into secondary education in Victoria. Throughout this time the researcher has observed, through the roles of teacher and Student Welfare Coordinator, that the cross-cultural experiences of these students can lead to some specific transition needs, encompassing educational, emotional and social needs. In order to develop an effective transition program, or even to see if one is actually warranted, it is firstly important to identify the key needs, both those perceived by the students and those already documented. This leads to the question:

What issues do Third Culture Kids perceive as significant during their transition into secondary education in Melbourne, Australia?

1.2 Definition of key terms

The term Third Culture Kids (TCKs) was first used by the sociologist Ruth Hill Useem in 1976 (Bowman 2001; Useem 1999; Gillies 1998) to describe children of diplomats, missionaries, business people and military personnel who have lived outside their native country for periods of time (Gillies 1998). A Third Culture Kid is also described as “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture… They build relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock 2000, p.2). Other terms for these students include Global Nomads, Hidden Immigrants,
Transnationals and Missionary Kids (Kidd & Lankenau 2001). Missionary Kids
(MKs), that is the children of missionaries, are a sub-category of Third Culture
Kids. The parents of these students are often teachers, pilots, doctors, nurses,
pastors or administrative staff who have been working overseas for various mission
organisations.

The process of transition into the Victorian secondary education system, following
time spent overseas, can be classified as an “unscheduled school transfer” (Jason et
al 1993, p1). Scheduled transfers occur at the end of primary school or secondary
school, whereas unscheduled transfers, which many TCKs experience, usually
occur as a result of parents moving due to a job change part way through a
schooling experience. These transfers can also be classified as non-normative or
unexpected school transitions (Alvidrez and Weinstein 1993) as they often do not
occur simultaneously with the student’s peers. In this context, the term transition
denotes “a passage from one state, stage, subject or place to another” (Webster
1994, p.764) and describes the change process undertaken by students as they
return to, or arrive in, Australia. For many TCKs who commenced schooling in
Australia before going overseas, this transition is also a re-assimilation into
Australian education, as they are absorbed back into the system.

Transition issues relating to educational adaptation begin with the identification of
differences in educational practice and routines the students have encountered since
arriving in or returning to Australia. In other words, what does the new school do
differently from the overseas school? This will also involve investigating the
schools attended by the participants, in an effort to identify general educational
differences. For example: Was the school an “International School” or an “American School”? Were participants required to wear a uniform?

The socialisation needs of Third Culture Kids relate to issues such as cultural and personal identity, cultural adaptation, self-esteem, connectedness and resilience. The concept of identity refers to “one’s sense of coherence of personality and continuity over time” (Grotevant & Cooper 1998, p.6), and is associated with “the partly conscious, mostly unconscious sense of who one is, both as a person and as a contributor, to society” (Hoare 1991, p46). A TCK’s identity is formed through a combination of personality with historical, cultural and situational contexts, and is an important factor in the development of social relationships. The concept of culture has numerous definitions that focus on behaviours, shared belief systems and similar worldviews. Traditionally culture has been defined “as a way of life of a people” (Jackson & Meadows 1991, p.72). It can be seen as a deep structure that shapes a person’s worldview.

Resilience can be defined as:

the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life. Even when hardship and adversity arise, it is as if the person has an elasticised rope around them that helps them rebound when things get low and to maintain their sense of who they are as a person (Fuller 1998, p75).

Resilience can also be seen as “normal development under difficult circumstances” (Fonagy et al, 1994), and is linked with “protective factors that support positive outcomes, despite adversity” (Daniel at el, 2002, p.10). Connectedness “involves processes that link the self to others” (Grotevant et al, 1998, p.4), where both TCKs
and their peers display sensitivity, respect and responsiveness by taking “into account the other’s viewpoint when expressing (their) own.” Issues of identity, connectedness and resilience are important aspects of socialisation and are particularly relevant when addressing transition issues for adolescents.

Adolescence is a term that is valid for all students involved in the transition into the various levels of secondary education in Australia. Frydenberg (1997, p.6) defines adolescence as “that period between childhood and adulthood when the individual is confronted by a series of developmental hurdles and challenges.” She goes on to describe it as a transition from childhood to adulthood, involving physiological and cognitive development. This suggests that TCKs re-entering the education system are undergoing multiple transitions, not just the school and cultural transitions.

### 1.3 Assumptions

The concept that Third Culture Kids all have “needs that must be addressed” (Pollock 2000, p.1) is the central premise of the study. In terms of selectivity, only people who fit the description of a Third Culture Kid and have returned permanently to Melbourne, Australia to complete their secondary education will be eligible for selection.
1.4 Limitations

As a qualitative study, a small group of six former students who fit the description of a Third Culture Kid will be invited to participate in this research project. Although findings from this study may be useful in identifying the needs of the participants, it is important to note that the needs of other Third Culture Kids may be very different, as each person’s experience is unique. Combining findings from this study with relevant literature will help to highlight possible needs. However, the possible future development of a transition program will need to ensure that the issue of individual differences is carefully addressed.

Third Culture Kids fall into two broad categories – those who have returned permanently and those on furlough. The students on furlough, who make up a small proportion of the TCK population, are aware their stay in Australia is limited to a maximum of approximately six to twelve months. As a result they have different transition needs to those who have returned permanently. This study will be limited to investigating the needs of the students who have returned to Australian on a more permanent basis. Students on furlough will not be selected.

This study focuses on students who have completed Year 12 and are now currently in Tertiary-level programs. As the students selected have been academically successful, they may form a distinct group. A broader group of TCKs may elicit different results.
1.5 Importance of the study

Pollock (2000, p.1) states that “the issues facing mobile parents and Third Culture Kids have not always been recognised or taken seriously.” Stuart (1992) indicates that although the transition process of leaving the parents’ home country may be difficult,

returning home can be just as traumatic. Some children move to a foreign country when they’re young and come back to the (home country) as teenagers. What most people don’t realize is that the (home country) can become as foreign as the host country is (Stuart 1992, p.74).

The identification of significant needs for TCKs is an essential initial step in addressing some of the specific sources of trauma associated with re-entering the Australian classroom. Although addressing much of the trauma associated with changing cultures is not the primary responsibility of schools, they can play an important role in making the transition as smooth as possible. Schools can also provide much needed support for the students if they are not receiving adequate outside support.

Bowman (2001) indicates that many TCKs grow up never quite feeling completely at home in either their parents’ culture or the local culture. As TCKs “feel their greatest sense of belonging when they are among others like themselves” (Bowman 2001), this study could be helpful in confirming socialisation needs and possibly identifying mechanisms that have improved the socialisation process for the students interviewed.
All school transitions, whether expected or unexpected, are “associated with increased psychological distress, lowered self-esteem, and a decline in academic performance” (Alvidrez and Weinstein, 1993, p.9). This, combined with the stresses associated with the physiological and cognitive transitions of adolescence, indicates the potential for serious trauma and further highlights the need for this study.

The study is also important as Third Culture Kids have “the potential (to build) informed bridges between cultures” (Pollock 2000, p.1). TCKs have a rich cross-cultural understanding and awareness, are often “tolerant of diversity, become skilled observers, and can serve as a model for multicultural education” (Gillies 1998, p.36). These students have the potential to be important links within a multicultural society.
2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 General Overview

While Foyle (1993) indicates the re-entry concerns for missionary children have been under discussion since 1930, much of the research into Third Culture Kids has developed from the work of Useem, who first developed the term in 1976. Cottrell & Useem (1999) undertook an analytical survey of approximately 700 American adult TCKs during the early 1990s. Although many of the findings relate to above average successes and higher education achievements of the respondents (comparison based on American general population), nearly 90% of respondents felt more or less “out of synch” with their age group. Respondents also reported that “being out of step with those around them is especially noticeable (and painful) in the late teens…” Many respondents also experienced a prolonged adolescence. Useem’s research confirms the view that TCKs are generally high academic achievers who experience socialisation issues to varying extents.

These finding are further supported by Folye who indicates that missionary children are “weak socially but strong academically” (Foyle 1993, p.146) and that there appears to be a “resurgence of the identity problem common to adolescence, whether or not this had previously been resolved successfully.” Pollock also indicates that TCKs suffer identity confusion (Pollock 2000) resulting from changing cultures during adolescence (Pollock and Van Reken 2001). A desire for anonymity (Kidd & Lankenau 2001) combined with a need for connectedness (Fuller 1998) also create stress and impact the resilience of TCKs during their transition into education in Australia.
2.2 Cultural Identity

While highlighting the possible benefits of being a Third Culture Kid, for example the potential to build informed bridges between cultures, Pollock (2000) indicates that many TCKs suffer identity confusion. An awareness of cultural differences and Pollock’s notion of a “culture iceberg”, which highlights the importance of understanding culture that is below the surface, is needed when conducting research involving TCKs. This “deep culture” is in the form of beliefs, values, assumptions and thought processes (Pollock 2000). An understanding of basic cultural rules is also an essential aspect of developing a sense of identity and belonging. As these rules are internalized during adolescence (Pollock & Van Reken 2001), issues of cultural change and confusion can impact the framework from which people interpret and make sense of the world around them. This is especially relevant for TCKs moving between countries during adolescence.

Given that “identity is constructed from within the person and culture in which it is forged” (Hoare 1991, p.48), a TCK’s identity is influenced greatly by the different cultures in which they have lived. Their identity also reflects “culturally distinct images, metaphors (and) worldviews” (Hoare 1991, p.49). As each worldview has different underlying assumptions, “what individuals see depends on whether or not it supports their view of reality, which is culturally bound” (Jackson et al, 1991, p.73). This sense of apparent reality has implications for TCKs as they attempt to connect with people who do not necessarily share their worldview.
A TCK’s sense of self, or identity, also influences their social interactions. The ability to correctly interpret different situations and realities is dependent on the ability to transcend one’s own perspective and understand each situation from within the reality of the people with whom they are interacting. This perspective is valid for both the TCKs and also for the people with whom they are interacting. The difficulty, however, is that “no one can fully flee the bias of his or her own reality to interpret objectively the reality of another.” (Hoare 1991, p.48).

Third Culture Kids arriving in or returning to Australia can also be classified as hidden immigrants (Pollock & Van Reken 2001). That is, they look like Australians, but think differently. Having spent many years outside the Australian culture, a TCKs worldview has been influenced by multiple cultures. As a result, TCKs may encounter people who assume Third Culture Kids are the same as themselves on the inside because they appear the same on the outside.

2.3 Adolescence and Cultural Adjustment

Third Culture Kids are also under stress from transitions associated with adolescence. Frydenberg (1997) indicates that adolescence is associated with various forms of stress, including developmental issues, concerns about peer relations, alienation from family, eating disorders, suicide, limited employment opportunities and career choices. Learning to cope is also part of adolescence. “The enhancement of coping can be achieved through a series of self-help techniques, counselling and clinical insights, and through the teaching of coping skills” (Frydenberg 1997, p.177). The development of optimism and humour can
also play a part in coping and well being. Issues relating to the stresses associated with adolescence will need to be identified, if possible, as they will undoubtedly be interwoven with the other transitional concerns of the student sample.

Cultural adjustment and adolescence are closely related. Feldman and Rosenthal (1994, p.118) found that “culture is a particularly powerful context for adolescent development because it has an impact on virtually every aspect of the adolescent’s life.” Given that many TCKs have to adapt to a new culture during the adolescent experience, the identification of socialisation needs for these students will be important. Liebkind and Kosonen (1998, p.207) also noted that “one of the most obvious and frequently reported consequences of acculturation (changes in identity, values, behaviour and attitudes through contact with another culture) is social disintegration, accompanied by personal crisis.” Cultural isolation and separation from family members are identified as major stressors. This final point is also relevant to this study as some permanent TCKs remain in school in Australia while their parents are overseas.

### 2.4 Transition

Pollock (2000 & 2001) identifies five stages of transition and indicates that schools can provide understanding and support at appropriate times. The first two stages, *involvement* and *leaving*, relate to the issues of grief and closure that students should undertake before departure. The final three stages, *transition*, *entering* and *re-involvement* are relevant to this study as they identify the need for schools to “take some responsibility for understanding the issues and supporting their students
through this difficult time.” (Pollock 2000, p.7). He suggests that upon entering the new school, TCKs should be mentored by persons who can make bridges, answer questions and make introductions. This raises the questions: In what ways could TCKs be mentored and supported in a way that respects their individuality and personhood?

Issues relating to the school transition are also valid for this study. Alvidrez and Weinstein (p.18) identify two primary reasons why students have difficulty making the school transition. The first is that students lack the necessary skills, knowledge or ability to make the change and the second is that the change process itself disrupts their ability to learn. Both of these factors are possibly valid concerns for TCKs entering education in Australia. Identifying some of the concerns TCKs currently have about the school transition is within the bounds of this study.

Foyle (1993) identifies middle school as the most difficult time for re-entry. Senior and junior students appear to be more accepted by their peers, while those in middle school (Years 7 to 9) struggle the most with issues associated with feeling different from their peers. This is most obvious in the social realm as re-entering missionary children “do not have the same interests as other children” (Foyle, p.147) and they do not always understand their peers’ language, meaning and terminology. However, Foyle (1993) indicates that 95% of re-entering missionary children would choose to be a missionary child. She also quotes studies that state that missionary children achieved an adjustment as good as, or better than their peers, and that they rank “phenomenally high”, in terms of graduate studies. This reinforces the claim that, generally speaking, missionary children are academically strong. Issues
relating to a perceived social weakness, however, require further investigation and are related to issues of resilience and connectedness.

2.5 Connectedness, Resilience and Anonymity

According to Kidd and Lankenau (2001), Third Culture Kids do not wish to appear to be different from their peers. They have a strong desire to belong and fit into their new peer group. At the same time, Fuller (1998) indicates that school and family connectedness are the two major protective factors for young people considered at risk. Given the stresses associated with transition and that “young people in middle adolescence are at the highest risk of developing depressive … disorders” (Fuller 1998, p.10), TCKs entering the education system during this time may be deemed at risk. This raises the question: how can the issue of school connectedness be addressed, while respecting the TCKs desire to remain anonymous?

To support TCKs, both educationally and socially, Kidd and Lankenau (2001) suggest the following:

- **Recognise and draw upon the strengths TCKs bring to the classroom**, but be sensitive not to make them appear different
- **Strive to help the students feel a part of the class and school**. For example, develop a buddy / mentor system, use cooperative learning strategies, and encourage involvement in extra-curricular activities
- **Provide support for academic transitions**, especially in areas that are different from the students previous school(s)
Foster students’ multicultural identities

Developing a strong sense of connectedness through emotionally linking a young person to the school, can help promote resilience in students who could be considered marginalised (Fuller 1998, p.11). This could be developed through the use of a mentor. Fuller, while discussing early adolescence, also indicates that “a school culture that supports and protects new entrants and involves parents is likely to result in fewer problems later” (p.7). The sense of connectedness, as previously stated, is also complicated by people viewing TCKs as the same as themselves, on the inside, simply because they appear the same on the outside.

2.6 Teachers, Schools and Third Culture Kids

Just as “TCKs may suffer cross-cultural shock or stress, however, so may their teachers, having to deal with different values – which they may not understand or even recognise” (Pollock 2000, p. 6). Developing some awareness of the TCKs cultural experience, as well as identifying TCKs as an “asset to any classroom (as) they offer rich cultural perspectives” (Gillies 1998, p.38), is an important approach for teaching staff. However, as previously outlined, Gillies states that teachers should not call too much attention to the uniqueness of a student’s background as this can create more problems for both the student and the teacher. Gillies indicates that schools should consider the transition difficulties and not just assume new students will simply adjust by themselves.
In relation to working with the “Internationally Mobile Child”, Gillies (1998, p.38) cites work by McCaig which reminds educators of the importance of the following points when working with TCKs:

- *Communicate* in a non-judgmental manner which encourages students to express feelings, and use conflict management strategies to work through problems
- Provide as many *constants* as possible. For example have clear expectations in the classroom
- *Collaborate* with students
- *Affirm value of the students’ multi-cultural nature*

The extent to which these points are valid for the selected student sample is something for this study to consider.
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Type of Study

The researcher was interested in investigating the socialisation and educational needs of Third Culture Kids during their transition into secondary education in Australia. Thus, the research needed to produce data that reflected “the experiences, feelings and judgments of the individuals” (Verma and Mallick 1999, p.27) involved in the transition process.

A qualitative approach was chosen as the researcher was interested in understanding the social, emotional and educational needs involved in the transition process from the participants’ perspectives (Merriam 1998, p.6). Hunter (2001) suggests that a qualitative approach also enables the researcher to become more involved in the research in order to attempt to understand how a situation is being interpreted by the participants.

This study involved gathering data that reflected the personal experiences and feelings of participants who have lived in more than one cultural setting. Verma and Mallick (1999) suggest that “the main feature of qualitative research methods is that meaningful explanations of social activities require substantial appreciation of (the) perspectives, culture and world-view” (p.27) of the participants involved. Thus, in an effort to collect meaningful data, a qualitative approach was implemented. This was achieved through the use of semi-structured one-on-one and focus group interviews, based on the following questions:
I. How did you feel about returning or coming to Australia?

II. What happened before you left for Australia? (Pre-departure briefing?)

III. What happened when you first arrived in Australia?

IV. How did you feel upon arrival?

V. How long was the period of adjustment and what were the influencing factors?

VI. What role does the family play in adjustment?

VII. Do schools require a specific transition program?

VIII. What are some of the positive aspects of the TCK experience?

IX. Where to from here? How has being a TCK influenced your career and study choices?

These research questions were formulated to further the researcher’s understanding of participants’ comments and experiences, rather than to support or disprove a specific hypothesis. Initial analysis of the semi-structured interviews was used to formulate questions for the focus group interview, thus enabling the data gathering to become more specific.

This qualitative research project could be considered a phenomenological study (Creswell (1998) p.49; Merriam (1998)p.15; Cohen et at (2000) p.23), as the researcher was concerned with understanding the specific issues associated with the phenomenon of a group of TCKs entering education in Australia. The researcher, as the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data, required the ability to adapt to situations that arose during interviews, in an effort to discover and understand the perspectives and worldviews of the participants (Merriam) during
their common experience of entering education in Melbourne, Australia during adolescence.

This study also contains aspects of an intrinsic case study (Stake 2000, p.437), as a major aim was to identify and understand the issues involved with a particular case, that is, transition issues for a selected group of Third Culture Kids.

Overall, a qualitative approach was used as it enabled the researcher to focus on the transition process and the individual people involved, with an emphasis on words rather than numbers (Maxwell 1996).

3.2 Source of Data

3.2.1 The setting

The subjects selected all graduated from a P-12 (Prep to Year 12) Christian Parent Controlled School located in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs during the years 2000 and 2001. The College of approximately 750 students consists of two mini schools: Primary (Prep to Grade 6) and Secondary (Year 7 to Year 12), located on the same campus. As a major aim of the College is to serve the wider Christian community, a number of missionary and other expatriate families select the College for their children’s education. The transition needs associated with entry or reentry for Third Culture Kids have not been assessed and the College does not offer specific support for these students or their families. Given that most TCKs enter the College during the middle school years, identified by Foyle (1993) as the most
difficult time for reentry, an investigation into these students’ perceived needs is warranted.

### 3.2.2 The participants

The majority of Third Culture Kids at the College are from the sub group Missionary Kids (MKs), thus four of the five participants in this project were MKs. The College also has two types of TCKs: those who have returned permanently and those who are back in Australia temporarily, usually for less than six months. As previously stated, the needs for the two groups are not necessarily the same, thus this study concentrated only on students who have returned to Australia permanently.

### 3.2.3 Sampling

The focus of the study was on former students who completed their secondary education at the College. These students bring a wealth of experience and an awareness of what their educational and socialisation needs are, as opposed to the middle school students who are currently experiencing the difficulties of the transition combined with adolescence – a time identified as crucial (Foyle 1993). Thus, purposeful sampling (Creswell 1998; Maxwell 1996) or criterion-based selection (Maxwell) was used to deliberately select participants who met the following criteria:

- the participant meets the definition of a Third Culture Kid
• the participant entered the College during the secondary years (any time from Year 7 to Year 12)

• the participant completed Year 12 at the College in either 2000 or 2001

Out of a school of approximately four hundred secondary students, eight TCKs graduated from the College during 2000 and 2001. Information about this project and a request to participate were sent to six students who met the above criteria. A total of five agreed to participate.

3.3 Research Methods

The following methods were used to identify, investigate and clarify the transition issues and needs of the participants.

3.3.1 Interviews with Participants

The primary method of data collection was one-to-one semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. This form of information gathering enabled the researcher to process, clarify and summarise verbal and non-verbal information immediately. As a result, the researcher was able to explore anomalous responses as they arose (Merriam 1998, p.7), thus maximising the data gathering potential of the interview process. Semi-structured interviews were also an effective way to “elicit opinions … and reveal the basis for the (participants’) reasoning” (Keates 1993, p.18). Maxwell (1996) suggests that interviews enable the researcher to further understand the meaning and context of responses, and that they assist the
researcher in identifying and exploring unexpected responses, thus helping to developed causal explanations.

The interviews were semi-structured, that is they followed a series of questions designed around the following areas of interest:

- Setting the scene. Where the participants have lived overseas, and the type of school(s) attended.
- Pre-departure (leaving). Feelings about coming to or returning to Australia. Information about pre-departure briefings.
- The transition experience and entering the College. What happened upon arrival at the College in Melbourne. Description of the early stages of the transition – events, relationship development, feelings.
- Re-involvement. Factors that influenced the period of adjustment. The positives of being a TCK and the effects of being a TCK on life after secondary education.

These interviews were important as they helped develop grounded theory, that is theory about the perceived needs which arises out of and is grounded in the data (Caulley 1994). While these interviews allowed freedom to investigate areas of interest, the challenge was to keep the participants reined in on providing information that was relevant to their transition experience.
3.3.2 Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview was conducted to further investigate the subjective experiences of the participants during their transition into education in Melbourne, based on analysis of the responses from the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. (Cohen et al.2000). It also served as part of the summative evaluations (Hurworth 1996b) following the initial interviews. Four of the five participants were able to attend, a sample size “large enough for diversity of perception” (Hurworth 1996b).

As Fern (2001, p.61) indicates, “the ambience of the room may influence group members and their productivity.” The participants chose to meet in a quiet room at an Indonesian restaurant. A convenient and relaxed location, with minimal distractions, where participants could sit around a table, facing each other (Hurworth 1996b). The interview commenced after a meal, which served as an effective warm up activity (Fern). The tape recording facilities failed immediately prior to the focus group interview, thus detailed notes were taken during the interview and fully transcribed at the conclusion of the interview.

Although Hurworth (1996b) indicates that “traditionally, the literature suggests that group members should not know each other”, she points out that “if some members do know each other beforehand it can lessen the time needed for the group to ‘thaw out’”. The participants familiarity with each other enabled the interview to progress smoothly and effectively, reinforcing the time effectiveness of this interview process. Hurworth also indicated that focus group interviews tend to be highly enjoyable to participants.
The central topic for the focus group was based on transition stages outlined by Pollock (2000), beginning with pre-departure, or leaving and ending with re-involvement. The warm up, broad question, which all participants could answer (Hurworth 1996b), focused on feelings and events that occurred prior to leaving for Melbourne. The ‘transition questions’ (Hurworth), outlined in Diagram 1, were constructed following analysis of factors that influence the period of adjustment. The goal and key question of the focus group was to identify the need for and content of a specific school based transition program. At the conclusion of the focus group interview, participants were de-briefed through discussion of positive aspects of being a TCK. They were also given the opportunity to raise any issues touched as a result of discussing their TCK experience.

Diagram 1: Outline of the focus group interview

The Focus group reached the key question within the specified time limit and fulfilled the purpose of collecting a range of opinions, rather than seeking to reach consensus (Hurworth 1996b).
3.4 Data Collection Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 1</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 3</td>
<td>One-on-one semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 4</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagram 2: Data Collection Timetable.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Trustworthiness “depends on the relationship of your conclusions to the real world” and “consists of the strategies you use to rule out” the threats (Maxwell 1996, pp.86-88). Possible threats to the trustworthiness of this study arise during the various stages of the research, including the description stage. Using audio recordings during all of the one on one interviews and member checks, where the participants give feedback on the verbatim transcriptions, inaccuracies in describing and recording the participants responses will be minimised.

The issue of triangulation, or fixing the truth, is addressed by the following:

- Multiple data sources – one-on-one semi-structured and focus group interviews involving five participants, with a mixture of males and females, supported by prior research and document analysis
- Member checks – participants to review and give feedback on transcripts and analysis
- Use of descriptive data and verbatim quotes
- An audit trail – all interviews, actions, observations will be recorded and coded

During the interpretation and analysis stage, the researcher needed an awareness of the possibility of imposing his “framework and meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied and the meanings they attach to their words and actions” (Maxwell, p.89). As Maxwell suggest, this can happen because of “not listening for participants’ meanings; not being aware of … (the researcher’s) own framework and assumptions; (and) asking leading, closed or short-answer questions that don’t give the participants the opportunity to reveal their own perspective.” (Maxwell p.90) The interview questions were carefully prepared to minimise questions that prevented the participants from clearly expressing their experience and perspective. Also, member checks following the analysis stage helped reduce the impact of the researcher’s perspective on the interpretation of the participants’ comments. As Maxwell (1996) also points out:

The most important check on such validity threats is to seriously and systematically attempt to learn how the participants in (the) study make sense of what’s going on, rather than pigeonholing their words and actions in (the researcher’s) own framework (p.90).

The issue of reactivity or the influence of the researcher on the participants being studied also requires attention. Maxwell indicates that although there are some things the researcher can do to prevent the more undesirable consequences of this,
such as avoiding leading questions, trying to minimise reactivity is not a meaningful goal of qualitative research. Rather, the researcher needs to use this effect productively, ensuring the participants feel free, but not pressured, to discuss issues they see as relevant, rather than only those immediately raised by the initial questions.

3.6 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis began immediately after the first interview. As Caulley (1994) indicates, analysis and data collection feed off each other and analysis occurs both during and after data collection. Thus, each interview was positively influenced by analysis from the previous interview. Also, the focus group interview, as previous stated, was based upon analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Hand methods of data analysis were used given the relatively small sample size. For this study, hand methods were more efficient and economical than using computer applications, especially as the computer applications can only sort and retrieve the data.

3.6.1 Coding Data

The first level of data analysis involved coding the audio-tape transcripts, with the aid of a word processor, in an effort to identify patterns and themes (Cohen et al 2000; Merriam 1998) using labels that were easily recognizable (Miles and
Huberman 1994). The codes were selected to enable the researcher to catch the complexity and comprehensiveness of the data.

3.6.2 Grouping Data – identifying themes

The second level of data analysis involved using a Miles & Huberman (1994) style semi-fixed grid (matrix) for the semi-structured interviews. A spreadsheet was used to group comments under themes identified in the initial coding, in clusters, in order to identify related categories. These clusters of categories enabled the researcher to further develop his understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The comments of individual participant were identified by participant number and the transcript page number as shown in Diagram 3, in an attempt to retain the holism of the interview. As Cohen et al (2000) state:

the great tension in data analysis is between maintaining a sense of the holism of the interview and the tendency for analysis to atomize and fragment the data – to separate them into constituent elements, thereby losing the synergy of the whole, and in interviews often the whole is greater than the parts (p.282).

The process was repeated using information from the focus group interview. Themes identified include: leaving, entering, re-involvement, adolescence, connectedness, individuality and anonymity, factors affecting the period of adjustment, transition programs, and positives of being a TCK.
## Theme – Entering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| People don’t understand my experience | nobody down here sort of shared our interests. Like, there’s no bush activities down here. It’s all TV, computer, computer games (p.5) | Oh I don’t think (they understand)...I think they thought I was just some jungle boy or something because they didn’t fully understand what it was like to be there. (p.4) | …you don’t know anything when you get back. I mean it might not even be sharing your overseas experience but its knowing that the person doesn’t know anything about where they’re living now, and understanding that this is actually what should be happening instead of other people who look at you, like, you know, you’ve been living under a rock for a while. (p.5) | …I find with peers and stuff now, like if you’re trying to tell them what it was like and stuff they don’t understand. I suppose people won’t understand, but I think with them, it’s just, their immaturity. (p.5) | I suppose I didn’t feel they really understood where I was coming from but I felt that they made an effort. They were probably pretty patient with me actually, with my grumblings! I probably wasn’t very good friends with them for the first semester. It probably had to do with the negative attitude though. (p.4) |

---

**Diagram 3: Matrix (Semi-Fixed Grid) to record some of the themes from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews.**
3.7 Relationship To Those Being Studied

Given that “people come into interactions by assuming situational identities that enhance their own self-conceptions … (and) may be context specific … rather than culturally normative” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez 2000, p.689), the researcher’s relationship and knowledge of the participants was valuable in identifying changes in behaviour during the interview process. Thus, an understanding of this relationship was important as it had the potential to improve the depth and trustworthiness of information and analysis obtained.

This group is of particular interest to the researcher as he had worked with many of them as a Physics/Mathematics Teacher, Student Welfare Coordinator or Homeroom Teacher during their time at the College. The researcher also accompanied a group of Senior School TCKs, including three of the participants, on a “Missionary Awareness Trip” to Irian Jaya (Papua), Indonesia in April 2000. This trip involved staying in some of the remote places where some of the participants were either born or lived for a significant part of their lives. Thus, the researcher had a close and positive working relationship, with some understanding of the background and personalities of the College’s senior TCKs. This relationship assisted in reducing the abnormal behavioural effects that can be produced by the interview situation and helped to ground the data within the culture of the research participant (Hunter 2001). At the same time, the researcher needed to be aware of any personal biases that may have arisen from previous experience with each student as this had the potential to affect not only the questions asked, but also the interpretation of their responses. The use of member checks, detailed field notes and input from informed sources was used to minimize any biases.
3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues and decisions “arise throughout the entire research process” (Kvale 1996, p.110). During the designing stage, it was important to gain the informed consent of the participants selected. This meant that a carefully worded permission form was developed. This form contained a section on confidentiality, stating that as far as possible, participants will remain anonymous. However, as the study involves the possibility of “publishing information potentially recognizable to others, the subjects were required to agree to the release of identifiable information” (Kvale 1996, p.114).

It is hoped that the consequences of the study will be positive, resulting in an improved understanding of the needs of the selected participants. However, it is also possible that the study may trigger stress in the participants’ lives. For example, memories of a traumatic reentry into Australia or negative images the participants have not considered for a few years. As it is not always possible to predict the possibility of a traumatic memory resurfacing, the researcher required sensitivity to this possibility at all stages. For the study to be trustworthy, however, these areas were not necessarily avoided, but were handled sensitively, enabling participants to discuss issues they saw as important to the transition process.

Kvale (1996) describes an interview as “a moral enterprise: The personal interaction in the interview affects the interviewee, and the knowledge produced by the interview affects our understanding of the human situation” (p.109). Possible consequences of the interview could include stress and changes in self-image if the participants recall emotionally sensitive situations. The researcher needed to “be
aware that the openness and intimacy of the interview may be seductive and lead subjects to disclose information they may later regret” (p.116). Sensitivity regarding how far to go with questioning was needed, and leading questions that place undue pressure on participants to disclose personal information were identified and removed during the design stage. Information about counselling support services was also available. These services include independent psychologists, Kids Help Line, LifeLine and adult TCKs.

A key ethical issue for the transcription stage is to ensure that the transcripts are an accurate reflection of what took place in the interview. Thus feedback from the participants was sought and they were given transcripts for proof reading, with the option of withdrawing or amending any information supplied. Participant feedback following analysis was sought to ensure that interpretations of the participants’ comments are accurate and verified. At the final stage the researcher needed to be conscious of reporting the findings in a way that accurately reflected the participants’ experiences, while respecting confidentiality.
4. CASE STUDY SUMMARY

The following is a brief summary of each individual case study. The participants’ names have been changed in an effort to maintain anonymity.

4.1 Matthew

At age six Matthew and his family left Australia for Papua New Guinea where his parents worked in the aviation and medical fields. Whilst in Papua New Guinea he attended an International School, which comprised approximately 80% national students and 20% international students, few of whom were Australian. At age nine, Matthew moved to an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory where he attended a state Primary School and then a state High School. In 1999, at age 14, Matthew moved to Melbourne where he commenced Year 10.

The transition from Papua New Guinea to the Northern Territory highlighted two main cultural differences: the language used by his teachers and aspects of the curriculum that relied on knowledge gained from television, which Matthew had not seen while he lived in Papua New Guinea.

The transition to Melbourne was a more challenging experience. Issues of unrealised expectations and a lack of local knowledge resulted in a somewhat traumatic time, with the first couple of days described as a nightmare. During the first few months he felt anger and depression “having moved from paradise to …
the hole.” (Matthew p.4) However, things did improve, even from the second day, as a few friendly students looked after him. As these friendships started to form over the first few weeks he began to feel more at home.

During his time in Papua New Guinea and the Aboriginal community, Matthew saw what he describes as a “gross lack of health care and resources.” Consequently, he is currently studying medicine, with the aim of working in either an Aboriginal or Third World Community. He has also received a scholarship to undertake work experience in outback Australia every year for four weeks as part of his studies.

Matthew still has thoughts of wanting to return to the Northern Territory, and he indicated that this will “probably be forever” as he is not a city person. Matthew graduated from Year 12 in 2001.

4.2 Jake

Jake was born in Irian Jaya, Indonesian. He grew up in a small, remote village where his parents were translators, before attending an International School (American curriculum) as a boarding student for most of his primary school education. He also spent approximately six months attending schools in Scotland and the United States of America.

At age 14, Jake arrived in Melbourne for the first time. He commenced Year 7 in 1996 where he found school a lot easier. Having come from a school with small
classes, where the teachers “made sure you knew what you were on about”, to an environment where the students “mucked around” helped make school “easier”.

As Jake had not been to Australia before, he did not know what to expect. Even though he had attended school in Scotland for half a year and a school in America “it was heaps different.” (Jake p.2) His main concern was about how he would fit in, having come from an International School.

Like the first year or so I didn’t have much of a clue. Like they’d talk about music, bands, sporting clubs, … it took a while to get up to date with all that sort of stuff. … Probably about the first year and a half like I was, I missed it heaps and then I was like, why can’t I go back. But after I realized that we’d moved to Australia for good, I thought why not just make the most of my time here. So that’s when I really started enjoying school (Jake p.4).

Jake felt that people saw him as “some jungle boy or something because they didn’t fully understand what it was like to be there.” (Jake p.4) However, he found playing sport a helpful way of getting to know his peers.

I had no idea what footy was all about so they sort of like taught me how to play which was fun. So I got to have fun with them. … They were like, oh, how can you not know how to play footy and so they started teaching me and that was sort of how I got to know them (Jake p.3).

Jake described his time in Irian Jaya as a very positive experience, making him more aware of other cultures. Changing cultures has also been a positive experience as it has enabled him to make new friends more easily. The time spent
outdoors in the jungles of Irian Jaya has also greatly influenced his future, including
his current tertiary degree in Park Management.

Jake graduated from Year 12 in 2001.

4.3 Ben

Ben left Australia with his family when he was seven years of age. He spent three
years in Botswana and then four years in Vietnam. The school in Botswana
followed an English curriculum and was very similar to Ben’s previous school in
Australia, the only exception being that Ben was often the only European child in
the class. In Vietnam, Ben attended an American style International School run by
the United Nations. During his time there, the school began implementing the
International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Class sizes +/- here were also much
smaller, so his class was like his “immediate family” and the school his “extended
family”.

Ben returned to Australia during term four of Year 9. Ben was not sure what to
expect from 15 and 16 year old western kids and he indicated that he spent the first
six months in a protective shell, not wanting to become too attached to Melbourne
or the people at school. Fortunately he did not fall behind in his studies as he had
already completed much of the work at the previous school. Ben found going from
being everyone’s friend and a School Captain to one of the “plebs” rather difficult.
Cultural differences, for example not knowing current sporting and television
personalities, also made entering conversations difficult. The transition process
was aided by a teacher who helped with information for example, football teams, current celebrities and which side of the road Australians drive on.

Rather than seeing the transition as a problem, Ben felt

it’s about what you expect and then what is actually delivered, and … if you sort of recalibrate those expectations to what is going to be reality then that could possibly improve how far people become distressed. It’s not going to stop it, …I’ve seen people, when they come back - it gets really hard for them and it’s unfortunate and it can be avoided. I also think in extreme cases counselling is definitely an advantage. It’s not something to be ashamed of. It’s definitely worthwhile, and the sooner you recognize it the better, because the longer it goes on the more rubbish you’re building up (Ben p.13).

Ben recently returned to his old school in Vietnam where he spoke about some of the transition issues with TCKs preparing to go “home”.

Ben’s overseas experience has greatly impacted his future career choices. He is currently studying a Bachelor of Commerce where he hopes to focus on international trade. Ben graduated from Year 12 in 2000.

4.4 Sarah

Sarah spent the first six years of her life in Tasmania, before moving with her family to Bandung, Indonesia. A year later she moved to Irian Jaya, Indonesia, for
a further five years. Whilst in Indonesia, Sarah attended an American run International School where classes were fairly small, and contained students from North America, Fiji, Asia and Australia.

Sarah returned to Tasmania for a short time during Grade Three. During this time she developed some school based friendships. Knowledge of these existing friendships helped to make the transition easier when she returned to the same school again in Grade Six. She also had relatives working at the school in Tasmania. Having these contacts and friends meant Sarah was not scared of returning to school in Australia. Although there were no other students with similar experiences in her class, her American accent and Indonesian experience made her popular, “like a toy.” Education gaps in relation to Mathematics and History became evident upon her return.

The transition to Melbourne at the start of Year 9 was not as smooth as returning to Tasmania. The thought of going to a big city and not knowing anyone, combined with an adolescence related “self-image crisis” resulted in her finding the whole experience very “scary”. Issues of self doubt and not wanting to feel different were more evident during the middle high school years, compared to the primary school experience. Issues of wanting to be equal with other students, and not labeled as special or different were also more prevalent in her secondary education.

As a result of her time in Indonesia, Sarah has developed a strong desire to work in similar settings. This, combined with her love of children, has seen her undertake a Primary Teaching Degree. Sarah graduated from Year 12 in 2001.
4.5 Rachel

Born in Niger, West Africa, Rachel attended a missionary school as a boarder from Grades 1 to 5, then from Grade 6 to Year 10 she attended an American International School in Nigeria, again as a boarder. The school in Niger had approximately 50 students, with around 10 pupils per class. The International school was larger, with a population of around 300, and class sizes of about 30 students. Here, unlike the first school, the students boarded off campus in various hostels.

Rachel and her family returned to Australia for one year in every four, before arriving in Melbourne permanently when she was half way through Year 10.

Rachel was a little nervous about leaving as she didn’t know much about Australia or Australians, given her experience of the strong American-Nigerian culture. Soon after her arrival she developed a “negative attitude” finding it hard to adapt to a different education system, with teacher expectations different from her previous experience. Upon reflection, the influence of American culture had a lot to do with the negative attitude as Rachel found things in Melbourne really “dorky” and “uncool”. She was also concerned that if she began to like things here, it meant she no longer liked things back in Nigeria. (Rachel p.5)

Rachel found that the transition came in stages which were difficult to define.

You sort of go … through stages when you hold onto the past and you don’t want to accept the present, and then you go through the stage … I’ll just forget the past and accept the present to fit in here, and I don’t belong there anymore anyway. And then it’s like, oh, I can keep both (Rachel p.5).

It was about two years after her arrival in Melbourne before Rachel really felt comfortable. She felt that the transition process is not just a “time thing, it’s what
happens in that time as well” (Rachel p.6). She also pointed out that the transition process is different for each person.

Rachel’s experiences in Africa have had a big impact on career choices. She is currently studying nursing as she wanted a job involving people. She sees nursing as a way of dealing with the poverty she saw in Africa. She also feels that her time overseas has helped make her more flexible and understanding of personal differences. Rachel graduated from Year 12 in 2001.
5. FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The importance of investigating and understanding the needs of Third Culture Kids during their transition into secondary education in Melbourne is outlined by the following comment from Ben.

I suppose that (when) leaving and coming back, people do know what’s going to happen, to a degree. I mean it’s different for everybody, but there are some common things that people tend to experience, and also common responses. You know some people get angry, some people do this and that. But yes it’s not really told, and it should be. So that when you’re going through it you know that’s it’s actually part of the experience and it’s normal. I’m not this weird kid who’s just going a bit nuts! (Ben p.9).

As previously stated, the following questions were formulated to further the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ experiences, rather than to support or disprove a specific hypothesis.

I. How did you feel about returning or coming to Australia?
II. What happened before you left for Australia? (Pre-departure briefing?)
III. What happened when you first arrived in Australia?
IV. How did you feel upon arrival?
V. How long was the period of adjustment and what were the influencing factors?
VI. What role does the family play in adjustment?
VII. Do schools require a specific transition program?

VIII. What are some of the positives aspects of the TCK experience?

IX. Where to from here? How has being a TCK influenced your career and study choices?

These questions helped form the basis for summarising the findings.

5.2 The transition

5.2.1 Leaving: Pre-departure

5.2.1.1 Thoughts about coming / returning to Australia

When preparing to come or return to Australia, the participants experienced a variety of feelings, ranging from excitement to concerns about how they would fit into the new environment. For Jake, who had never been to Australia, the prospect of moving to Australia looked exciting, however, he did not want to leave Indonesia. Although changing schools was not a concern, given he had changed schools a number of times, Jake was a bit worried about not knowing anyone. Other concerns were centered around how he would fit into the different school and an uncertainty of what to expect when he arrived. He also had visions of Australians being like Crocodile Dundee.

Rachel was not scared until the last hour on flight into Melbourne when she realized she would “have to do it now!” (focus group p.2). Although excited by the prospect of a new experience, she was concerned about friendships and having to make new friends. She also thought about not seeing a lot of her current friends.
again. Rachel was scared at the thought of starting again, but also saw this as an opportunity for a fresh start. “You could be whoever you wanted to be when you came back” and “I had to decide if I was going to change or be the same.” Rachel also thought a lot about what life would be like, but as she did not have much knowledge on which to base her thoughts, she “made up” what school, friendships and Melbourne would be like. She was also nervous as she didn’t know very much about Australia or Australians, and how they communicated, thus she was concerned about how she would fit in.

Although sad to leave, Matthew was excited about moving to Melbourne. He thought about the positive things he imagined would happen, assuming the transition would be positive. He idealized Melbourne and did not contemplate any of the implications resulting from the move. Although he had “normal fears about school” (focus group p.2), Matthew expected the school to be caring and supportive. He was shocked when he actually arrived in Melbourne, as the transition experience was not as smooth as he expected.

Ben was “a little bit scared” (Ben p.2) by the thought of coming to Melbourne as he didn’t know what to expect. Sarah, however, although sad to leave, was excited by the thought of seeing her extended family again. She was also looking forward to seeing friends she had made at school two years prior to her permanent return to Australia. On reflection, Sarah felt she didn’t really appreciate the significance of the change at the time, as she was relatively young.
5.2.1.2 What happened prior to departure?

Issues of closure were not addressed specifically for most of the participants. For Ben, any closure was what he invented. He was supported by the student body who organized mail and phone lists, so that he could keep in contact with friends. The school didn’t really help prepare him for the coming changes. Ben’s parents had done some background reading and gave him some information about schooling, however, they did not actually sit him down and go through what was going to happen.

As part of the closure process, Jake had a “big beach trip” to say goodbye to his friends. Beach trips were considered a special time with his friends, and thus this was a very meaningful way to say goodbye. Jake spoke with his “friends and other Australians” to clarify his expectations and understanding of Australia. These discussions “helped a little” as his friends knew how hard it was to say goodbye. He also recalled sitting down with his family to discuss the choices of moving to Australia, America or England. These discussions also focused on planning for the change and on deciding where the family would live. School options were not mentioned at this point in time. Jake and his family also spoke about transition issues with representatives of the mission organization before departure.

Rachel’s parents were “big on closure and reentry” (focus group p.1), identifying the change as a “big thing”. The family talked quite a lot about plans for Dad’s job, school changes, a new house and the importance of saying goodbye. Rachel found parts of a book on reentry issues, given to her by her parents, helpful. Although a teacher “had a quick chat (and) talked about the importance of saying goodbye”
properly (focus group p.3), the school primarily focused its transition support on the Year 12’s, thus, nothing else was done. Rachel also spoke with an Australian lady prior to leaving Africa. This was a positive experience as it enabled her to ask questions about Australia. Speaking with friends who had spent time in Western countries was also helpful.

Closure for Matthew came in the form of family discussions, a farewell party with friends and a family farewell at a conference. Matthew’s family talked “quite a bit” about the coming changes.

5.2.2 Entering: Arrival in Australia

It doesn’t matter how much you are prepared, there’s still going to be something you don’t know and there’s still going to be the fact that the people you’re now meeting, they don’t sort of relate to what you have experienced. … you can’t stop it. It’s not a problem. … I think for some people they don’t make that connection, they see it as a problem. Then they get really scared of what’s coming up instead of … working through with hope that there is an end (Ben p.6).
5.2.2.1 Initial contact with the school in Melbourne

Ben, Rachel and Matthew all recall visiting the school prior to their classes starting. Ben went to the school twice before actually starting. After arriving in Melbourne in June or July, Ben and his family visited the school during the holiday period. Thus, there were no students present the first time he went. He then went back the next week, when students were present, where he met some of the teaching staff, and walked around the grounds. Ben did not “think it was any different from just going and visiting a new school. It wasn’t a life-changing event” (Ben p.4). Ben and his family then had an interstate holiday, before starting school at the beginning of Term 4. Rachel’s experience was fairly similar. Her initial contact with the school involved looking around the campus and meeting with the Year Level Coordinator, again during the June/July holidays. Matthew, however, visited the school six months prior to commencing classes. This involved meeting the “introductory person” who took the family on a guided tour of the campus. Matthew indicated that touring the school was helpful.

5.2.2.2 The first days at school in Melbourne

I think you’ve always got that novelty of the new kid. When I first arrived I still remember that the two guys who were pulled out of the assembly and they were sort of the welcoming committee. (For) the first week I was just with them pretty much all the time and they showed me around. But after about a week it sort of died down (Ben p.2).
Three of the participants recall the first day of school in Melbourne, where they were met by a student “buddy” who was supposedly responsible for looking after them for the first few days. While generally seen as a positive support, Matthew cannot recall seeing the buddy after the first morning. For Ben, the support offered by the “welcoming committee” or buddies, was valuable as they showed him around and spent time with him, especially during the first few weeks. Rachel also found the support helpful, although she was initially concerned that it might limit her friendship groups. Rachel also recalled an incident on the first day when the buddy introduced her to someone who did not want to talk to her.

Matthew described the first two days as:

- pretty much a nightmare. I remember the night after the first day I was very upset … and really didn’t want to go back (to school). … I couldn’t see why we had to move down, and I suppose I was expecting a nice friendly school, and I didn’t have any friends or anything. But then the day after I met a few kids who were really friendly and who sort of looked after me for a while and then over the next couple of weeks that friendship developed and I felt more and more at home. But it did take a while… (Matthew p.3).

He also recalled concerns about the wearing of the school uniform, and described arriving at school on the first day with his younger brother. They were both wearing their “socks pulled up as far as they could go” (Matthew p.4). While walking down the driveway they were both looking around to see how other students were wearing the uniform: “Um, down they go!”
For Jake, arriving at the start of Year 7 meant that he was not the only new student. He recalled that his personal interactions on the first day were mainly with the students who had not come up through the College’s Primary School. He found it “a lot easier to interact with people who didn’t know anyone” (Jake p.3).

5.2.2.3 School Uniform

For Matthew, Ben and Rachel, the school transition brought about their first experience of a formal school uniform at a Secondary College level. This was a significant transition issue for Matthew:

pretty much the first thing that I noticed was that I had never had to wear a uniform; I never wore a uniform in high school. In primary school it was just a t-shirt and shorts in one colour or something, so I had no idea what to do with this. Socks up or socks down, shirt in or out, and do the top button up or not? Not that we followed what the teachers said! I didn’t even know how to tie a tie… I didn’t really enjoy that all that much. … that was a big thing, uniform, getting used to that (Matthew p.3).

Matthew and his family also had difficulty understanding some of the uniform requirements, in particular, they had no idea what “non-marking shoes” were. Clarification of uniform requirements, and also help with where to go for second hand items, including books and stationery, were identified as issues of concern.

Rachel did not have her uniform for her first day at school, so she wore free dress. She indicated that this was a “bit scary” (Rachel p.3), but wasn’t uncomfortable
being out of uniform. Initially, when Rachel was informed she was required to wear a school uniform, she “wasn’t very happy”. However, she soon liked having a uniform because it meant she “didn’t have to choose clothes ever again!”.

When Ben received his new uniform he thought:

thank goodness. It’s not going to be… a dressing contest …now with new people and … possibly not having the latest fashions … So having a school uniform was sort of like, everyone’s going to look the same. It doesn’t matter (Ben p. 7).

5.2.2.4 Expectations

Concerns arising from unclear or unmet expectations were evident, to varying degrees, for most of the participants. Ben, Rachel and Jake all indicated that they were unsure of what to expect, while Matthew had expectations of arriving at a more friendly school. While Ben indicated that he “wasn’t quite sure what to expect from fifteen and sixteen year old western kids who (he) didn’t know very well” (Ben p.3), he did expect that they would not “be anything like the people that (he) had just left.” Subsequently, he decided to withdraw from deeper school based relationships for the first few months.
5.2.3 Re-involvement

5.3.2.1 Coming “Home” Is Hard!

For Ben, coming “home” part way through Year 9 was not an easy process. He indicated that:

   when you go overseas you accept that it’s going to be hard, and you don’t see that as this big thing that maybe you can avoid. You know that it’s going to be hard and everybody tells you that it’s going to be hard. But when you’re going home, nobody tells you that it’s going to be hard because to them that’s where you came from so it’s not, you know, how can it be hard to go home? Even if you would take that on a more micro level, you know, it’s not hard to go home, and then they sort of take that to a higher level and view it the same way, but to many kids home is where they are, and going back to where they came from is not home at all (Ben p.6).

Matthew described arriving in Melbourne at the start of Year 10 as moving from “paradise to a hole”. Sarah, however, had come back to the Tasmanian school in Grade Three, thus adjusting and reviving old friendships, when she returned in Grade Six, was not difficult. Sarah did comment that arriving in Melbourne at the start of Year 9 was not an easy transition.

5.2.3.2 The period of adjustment

5.2.3.2.1 How long does it take to “adjust”?  

Adjusting to the new environment was generally seen by the participants as accepting the fact that they were in Melbourne on a more permanent basis. Although very much an individual process, adjustment took anywhere from six months to three years. Jake thought about Indonesia everyday for the first “six months to a year” (focus group p.3). He describes looking at photos and year books “every day” during this time. He was still missing Irian Jaya “heaps”, and longing to return, eighteen months after arriving in Australia (Jake p.4). Matthew remembered that during the first couple of months both he and his family were “really sort of angry, depressed and blaming (his) parents” and the mission organization for making them move (Matthew p.4). For approximately three years he was thinking that Melbourne was only a temporary placement, he was “always wanting to go back.” He described only recently, some four years after arriving in Melbourne, looking at an object in his bedroom “which brought back feelings – still there, but I don’t stew over them every day like I used to” (focus group p.3).

For Rachel, the adjustment period was around two years. While she did not take two years to stop thinking about the past every day, it did take 2 years for her to realize: “I have to settle in and accept the Australian way of doing things” (focus group p.3). “I’d say after two years is when you … can feel really comfortable here but I mean, that didn’t mean that whole two years was terrible” (Rachel p.6). Rachel also indicated that the time taken to adjust depends on how long you choose to hold on to the past.

Sarah felt she “adjusted pretty much straight away” as she already had a friendship group (focus group p.3). Although she missed her overseas friends, she was “young so didn’t realize implications of not going back” overseas.
The novelty of being new, for Ben, wore off “after about a week … You’re not the new kid any more, you’re just the kid who came from somewhere and you’ve just got to work your way into the system, I suppose, with your friends” (Ben p.2).

Ben had already completed Year 9 before returning to Australia, so spending Term Four of Year 9 in Australia gave him an opportunity “to scope out the school, scope out the people” (Ben p.3). However, issues relating to the development of friendships and trust did carry on into Year Ten. “It wasn’t like I went away on a holiday and came back and I was set. It still took a long time, and to an extent still today there are things that I don’t put forward information about.” To help soften the “painful feelings”, Ben, like Matthew, saw his arrival in Melbourne as another temporary placement. He would think: “I can leave here, even if it’s in three or four years. I can, I can leave” (Ben p.6).

5.2.3.2.2 Deciding Factors.

Factors that influenced the length of the adjustment period include specific events, the age at which the TCKs returned, connectedness with peers and family, changes in thought processes and personal decisions to accept the life changes and move on.

For Jake, the realization that he had moved to Australia permanently was a major contributing factor to accepting his current circumstances and moving on with his life. This realization marked a decision to get “more involved in Australia”. As he stated:
for about the first year and a half … I missed it heaps and then I was like, why can’t I go back? But after I realized that we’d moved to Australia for good, I thought, why not just make the most of my time here sort of. So that’s when I really started enjoying school. … Always looking back and wishing you were there … (and that) you hadn’t really left, … that sort of stops you…being able to fit in (Jake p.4).

Jake also found that when his “old friends” did not contact him for a while, it forced him to make new friends. Thus, he suggested the possibility that contact with old friends be banned (focus group p.4) for a while to force the formation of new friendships. This suggestion was not supported by the other participants (focus group p.4).

Changes at the school in Africa, including overseas friends graduating and moving on, helped Rachel to let go of her past. This helped form an attitudinal change, where she chose to “accept the Australian way of doing things, … rather than saying the Nigerian way is better” (focus group p.3). Thoughts of her overseas friends having a good time without her also helped her realize the need to have “real friendships” in Australia. Rachel also identified a series of stages she experienced during the transition period:

You sort of go through stages when you hold onto the past and you don’t want to accept the present. … Then you go through the stage: “Oh, you know, I’ll just forget the past and accept the present to fit in here, and I don’t belong there anymore anyway.” And then it’s like: “Oh, I can keep both (Rachel p.5).
The development of new friendships and connections, during the first few weeks of school in Melbourne, helped Matthew “feel more comfortable and sort of happier going to school each day” as he knew he would have someone to “hang out with at recess and lunch” (Matthew p.4). This was particularly important as these friendships meant he wouldn’t have to walk around on his own, something he did not enjoy.

One of the key deciding factors Ben identified involved recalibrating his initial expectations with the reality of what was actually delivered. Although he felt that this does not stop people becoming distressed, it can reduce the amount of distress experienced. Upon reflection of his interactions with other TCKs, Ben also felt that counselling for “extreme cases” of distress was “definitely an advantage” and it is ... not something to be ashamed of. It’s definitely worthwhile, and the sooner you recognize it the better, because the longer it goes on the more rubbish you’re building up (Ben p.13).

5.2.3.2.3 Importance of the family.

The common bond families develop through sharing a similar experience was identified as an important factor during the adjustment period. Matthew found that his family provided comfort and support as it was the only normality in his life, everything else had changed. For Rachel, her family provided both someone to laugh about Australia with and also to extend sympathy when she did something “stupid”. However, as each family member was having “a hard time and didn’t really talk”, family situations did occasionally get “a bit tense” (focus group p.4).
While family connectedness and support were identified as very important in helping with the adjustment process, the participants with older siblings all noted some difficulty due to these siblings also struggling with the transition. Sarah found it hard not knowing how to help her older sister while Rachel felt that she had “two people to worry about”: herself and her older brother (focus group p.5).

Unrealized expectations of the extended family were identified by Ben as another possible factor in making it “difficult to come back”. As he indicated:

even your extended family doesn’t relate to you about where you’ve been and you expect them to, and you expect them to because they are your family, and you expect them to because they look the same and they come from the same country (Ben p.13).

5.3 Cultural Identity and Connectedness

5.3.1 Cultural Identity

The participants were asked to describe the culture or cultures they identified with the most. Ben, Matthew and Rachel identified a specific TCK culture, which, as Rachel described, has been “influenced by the places you have been” (focus group p.7). Matthew indicated that he has “identified for a long time with an MK culture” (focus group p.7).

I’d probably say that I have noticed that throughout my life, not necessarily all occasions but I know that I’m sort of different to other people. I don’t
know how much of that is influenced by having the background that I have. I suppose there’s also the influence of the friends that I’ve had … most of them have been well, a few of them, are MK’s as well…” (Matthew p.11).

Sarah and Jake similarly described feelings of being a “mixed breed” (focus group p.7), identifying with the different cultures they have experienced. While Jake feels he is “mainly Australian”, he also associates strongly with the cultures of the other countries in which he has lived: America and Indonesia.

5.3.2 Connectedness

5.3.2.1 Friendship groups and making connections

The main thing that I noticed coming to school here in Australia was that in Australia there’s a lot of groups. Like you’ve got the popular group or you have some leaders and that, then you’ve got followers, sort of thing. Whereas in Indonesia there’s none of that. So that was a shock to me. I couldn’t see how so many people could just follow certain people … and do what they did (Jake p.4).

For Jake, playing sport was a helpful way of making positive connections with his peers, and enabled him to form links within the sub group culture of the school. As he stated:

I had no idea what footy was all about so they taught me how to play, which was fun. So I got to have fun with them. … They were like: “Oh, how can
you not know how to play footy?” And so they started teaching me and that was sort of how I got to know them (Jake p.3).

Ben also noted an emphasis on friendship groups:

I remember at the time people would ask me, you know, what’s your friendship group? I remember thinking at the time that really … I was a floater. I’d sort of bounce from group to group. I wouldn’t really get very intimate, I suppose is the word, with the group and wouldn’t risk anything to them. I’d become vulnerable and then if it was getting too close I’d just move on to the next group and leave that one behind until three months later (Ben p.3).

Rachel initially felt that having an allocated buddy meant that she would be “set” with one group of friends for the next two years, she indicated that:

if I’d wanted to I could have changed (groups) really. I think that’s the thing I found a bit hard, is that it sort of set me with one group of people but at the same time it was really good because it was really helpful having someone to show me around, someone to be with (Rachel p.4).

Thus, the connections with a friendship group provided Rachel with valuable assistance during the transition process.

5.3.2.2 Support of other TCKs

The importance of interaction with, or at least an awareness of the existence of other TCKs, was identified as an important supportive factor during the transition
phase. In Sarah’s experience, other TCKs “had the same feelings … and similar experiences” (Sarah p.10), thus they were people you could “vent on … and just let those feelings out.” Other TCKs were able to offer some understanding and support due to their awareness of the difficulties associated with the transition.

Matthew describes meeting another TCK during the first week of school as good because we could sort of talk about our experiences. He reasonably understood where I was coming from, and then there were a few others who were really friendly. I don’t know how well they understood. … obviously we all had different experiences, and he’d already been down for three years previously so he was sort of half-socialising in Australian culture. But it was good having him around (Matthew p.5).

Rachel’s experience was slightly different, in that her initial expectations of strong relationships with other TCKs were not realized.

I think at first when I came back I thought, oh, you know, MK’s, they’ll be my best friends! And they didn’t, well I think a lot of them had spent a lot more time here already and they didn’t sort of have the same, you know, excitement about our similarities. Like I’m the same now, it’s not like, oh, MK! I think I had that sort of mentality then (Rachel p.7).

While Ben did not talk about his overseas experiences in great detail with other TCKs, he indicated that “it was a help that there was someone there who was also having a hard time” (Ben p.5). He did recall one conversation with another TCK part way through Year 12. By the time
…we got to share … I’d pretty much settled in quite well but I don’t think it was even the talking. I remember the way the conversation finished was, you know, if you ever want to talk about Africa then there’s no problems with that, and just having that knowledge that there was someone you knew helped, just a little bit. Maybe it helped her more than me because she hadn’t been in Australia as long as me (Ben p.5).

5.3.2.3 Interaction with Teachers

Issues of cultural differences and unclear expectations were identified by some of the participants during reflections on their interactions with teachers in Australia. For Rachel, there was some confusion “as to how and what the teachers expected” (Rachel p.8) of her. This was especially evident when work was returned without clear reasons for loss of marks.

Ben identified a strong sense of family with his school in Hanoi. School was “almost like your extended family and your class was like your immediate family” (Ben p.1). Thus, he “felt like there was more of a relationship with teachers (in Hanoi) than anywhere else.” However, he also recalled a teacher in Melbourne …who volunteered time with myself and my sisters to go through what is Australia, and what is Melbourne and that’s when I learnt who the football teams were and stuff like that. … That was very good (Ben p.4).

Sarah recalled returning to Primary School in Tasmania.
I kind of got embarrassed sometimes ‘cos …the teachers kind of made me do talks and stuff on Indonesia. Like, that’s cool; I didn’t really mind it that much (Sarah p.3).

Matthew also described an incident he experienced upon arrival at school in the Northern Territory, and the language used by the classroom teacher.

The language she used was sort of, what I felt like was fairly insulting. Like, she called me a goose and an idiot and all that sort of thing. Of course that’s normal in Australia but I took it literally… apparently I came home crying and saying “I’m not an idiot am I?”, and my parents had to go talk to her. …

Looking back now it sounds really stupid (Matthew p.2).

Arriving in Melbourne, Matthew found the teachers very similar to those in the Northern Territory. He did describe the support of the Student Welfare Staff as helpful as they “actually got out amongst the kids and sort of met with them rather than waiting for them to come” for help (Matthew p.6).

**5.3.2.4 Sharing life story with others.**

Matthew was informed, during an initial interview with a teacher from the school in Melbourne, that “everybody will want to hear your story” (Matthew p.9). Thus Matthew was hoping that sharing his life experiences with the other students would be a good talking point. However, his actual experience upon arrival at the school was the exact opposite, “nobody was interested at all.” Matthew recalled an assembly on his first day at the new school where he introduced himself to a fellow student by saying: “Hi, I’m Matthew. I’m from the Northern Territory” (focus group p.6). Although Matthew did develop a friendship with the other student, this
comment was a source of ridicule and humor for a number of years. It was noted, however, that this ridicule was a form of acceptance and friendship.

Having a different accent drew attention and interest to Jake’s past. He found that people would ask him questions about where he had come from and what life was like in Indonesia. Thus, he was able to share some of his life story.

Sarah’s experience was very similar:

I came back with an American accent …, so everybody was like, oh cool, and asking me all these questions like: What was Indonesia like? and, can you maybe speak Indonesian? So I was kind of like a toy or something (Sarah p.3).

Ben noted that:

every relationship that I start with an Australian doesn’t include where I’ve lived. It’s usually something that people find out about me a long way down the track. I know of one friend, it took a year and he was probably one of my closest friends at the time …with my Australian friends it’s something I don’t talk about much with at all …. It’s very rare when (my experiences) come out. I mean, just telling someone I’ve lived overseas is usually the extent to which we go. I don’t start sharing stories. …. Even my girlfriend would not know a third of the stories that I share with people that come from other countries (Ben p.12).

Ben also found that “being discreet about where you come from” (Ben p.12) is important as “sharing stories and knowledge about where you come from sort of ruins … fitting in.”
I think it’s that fear, or maybe even a knowledge that while what I say is
very interesting to me and is part of my life, to the other person it’s sort of
very, oh, that’s interesting, maybe one more follow up question and then it’s
moved on very quickly. If you’re in a group … you can talk for fifteen,
twenty minutes on someone’s football career … and then you get about two
minutes for four years of your life living in another country. So it’s just
what people know, and they obviously don’t know where you’ve lived, and
while they may be interested, I think they don’t know how to express that
interest or maybe they don’t know what to expect from you or what to ask
you (Ben p.3).

5.3.2.5 No one really understands my experience

A common feeling for each of the participants was: no one really understands my
experience. This is summed up in Jake’s comment: “I think they thought I was just
some jungle boy or something because they didn’t fully understand what it was like
to be there” (Jake p.4).

While Rachel felt other people did not really understood where she was coming
from, she did feel that they made an effort. In fact,

…they were probably pretty patient with me actually, with my grumblings!
I probably wasn’t very good friends with them for the first semester. It
probably had to do with the negative attitude though (Rachel p.4).

Matthew also noted that “nobody down here … shared our interests” (Matthew
p.5), for example, most activities were television or computer based, and there were
no bush activities. Matthew also felt that other students were not really interested in his life story, mostly because they were unable to relate to his experiences.

Sarah, even today, finds that “if you’re trying to tell (other people) what it was like … they don’t understand” (Sarah p.5). Issues of immaturity and a lack of desire or ability to understand other people’s experiences were also identified as challenging during her school experience.

While describing some of the transition issues for TCKs, Ben indicated that TCKs don’t know anything when (they) get back. I mean it might not even be sharing your overseas experience but it’s knowing that the person doesn’t know anything about where they’re living now, and understanding that that is actually what should be happening instead of other people who look at you, like, you know, you’ve been living under a rock for a while (Ben p.5).
5.3.2.6 Individuality and Anonymity – the importance of not being seen to be different

A common theme identified by each of the participants was the need to approach each TCK as an individual who does not want to appear different from their peers. Ben’s motto, during the transition period, was “as little attention as possible” (Ben p.2). While reflecting on the desire of TCKs to fit in with their peers, Ben indicated that

picking people out, even if it’s in a positive way, doesn’t really help them, because …at that time …you don’t know who you are, you don’t know where you’re supposed to come from and it would be nice to remember places or things that’ you’ve just left. It’s sort of like bringing up a dead parent a week after it’s happened… (Ben p.11).

While happy for her peers to know she had lived overseas, Sarah felt that “you should be careful about the way you handle” (Sarah p.6) sharing this information. She emphasized the fact that she does not like to be seen as “different from everybody else”, that she is the “same” or “equal” to other people, and that she does not like being labeled as “special” or “different”.

5.3.3 Hidden Immigrants

Upon thought and reflection, all of the participants agreed that having a similar physical appearance to their Australian peers most likely contributed to other people’s misplaced expectations that they would have some understanding of local culture. However, the participants did not realize this at the time. It was apparent
that the TCKs interviewed felt that teachers, students and extended family members assumed they had some understanding of local culture. Rachel summarised the overall experience when she stated that “people assume you know about local stuff, for example, footy. People assume you’re like everyone else” (focus group p.6). However, Rachel’s American accent helped her, as it gave her an opportunity to explain, when she wanted to, why she was different.

Ben also highlighted how non-TCKs have difficulty identifying the TCKs lack of local knowledge.

It’s a bit hard, I mean there’s still definitely a cultural clash from any country to any other country, but there’s definitely more of a clash when you come from some of the developing countries back to Australia. Yeah, I think people who may have lived in developed countries; they still don’t have that understanding of how you don’t know anything. You don’t know what the latest fashion is… (Ben p.5).

5.4 Adolescence and the Best Time to Move

When asked to reflect on how the transition process may be affected by adolescent related issues, Rachel indicated that

MK’s tend to blame a lot of normal emotional things on being an MK. ‘I wish I was in Nigeria – it would be perfect there.’ People think it would be perfect back there. Adolescents have stronger emotions and pressures to be cool. The (transition process) is doubled as teenagers have (adolescence) plus changing countries (focus group p.6).
Sarah also found the transition to Melbourne more difficult due to “adolescent related issues” (focus group p.6). Matthew, however, wondered if his relationships would have been different (deeper), particularly those in Papua New Guinea, if he had remained there into adolescence, before moving to the Northern Territory.

Jake and Matthew also indicated that males seem to get “bagged” or teased more about their experiences. This was attributed to adolescent male attempts to develop a sense of connectedness (focus group p.6).

In terms of the “best time to move”, both Sarah and Rachel felt that younger is better. Although Rachel’s youngest sister found the transition difficult, both felt that their older siblings had the hardest time adjusting to the cultural changes.

5.5 School Comparison

Differences in curriculum, academic standards, class sizes, interpersonal relationships and discipline were some of the areas identified by the participants when comparing their experience of overseas schools with school in Melbourne.

Ben indicated that the larger class sizes in Melbourne were a significant contrast to his previous experience. In Hanoi,

the school was like a family, almost like your extended family and your class was like your immediate family. … You always hung out together and you became really close…. Everyone’s just your friend … (Then) you go
from being one of the sort of famous people to one of the plebs at the new school. So I just kept my mouth shut and went to class (Ben p.1).

Ben also found school in Melbourne, after coming from an International Baccalaureate school, “was probably a step-down in difficulty.” Having already studied the English books covered at the end of Year 9 and the beginning of Year 10,

made it a lot easier for me to withdraw from just everything. I could really just sort of go into a shell for six months and come out and not really have to catch up much with anything (Ben p.3).

Motivation to achieve high academic results at his previous school, was primarily driven by the students “pushing each other on” (Ben p.8), rather than by the teachers. Given that many of the students were the “cream of the crop from their own countries”, Ben indicated that the students had high academic goals and were very much self motivated.

Jake found school in Australia considerably easier than the International School in Irian Jaya. He described learning “a lot” in Irian Jaya, but felt that “in Australia you just mucked around a lot in class which, after a while, I got used to, but at the start I wasn’t really up for that” (Jake p.5). Sarah, also coming from the American curriculum based International School in Irian Jaya, raised concerns about curriculum differences, especially in Mathematics and Australia History.

Matthew did not feel the school in Melbourne was “any better” (Matthew p.4) than his previous school in the Northern Territory. In fact, he felt that his previous school had better resources, more subjects and similar teachers and students. He did note, however, that the school differences from Papua New Guinea to the
Northern Territory were more obvious. This was particularly evident in the Northern Territory school’s use of curriculum that was dependent on a knowledge of television, something Matthew had not seen for a number of years.

A greater emphasis on the presentation of school work, compared to her previous school, surprised Rachel as she struggled to settle into the new school routines. Difficulty understanding teacher expectations for both class work and homework were also identified as areas of concern. Rachel indicated that

when I started school I found it pretty hard I think, like because even just the system was so different. So I wasn’t really sure what to expect and what teachers expected of me, and well, even just how things work … with peers and teachers and lots of things (Rachel p.3).

Rachel also found that when she would get the results back from work submitted she was unsure “what was wrong with it” (Rachel p.9). She felt that this lack of adequate feedback was “because most people already … would know … what’s expected of them” and she did not. Rachel indicated that it would have been helpful if the teachers had had some basic information of her overseas experience, so that they could improve their understanding of her background. She described, for example, a teacher asking if she had a text book from her old school.

When I think about it now I’m like, well that’s an obvious question, but to me I was like, why does she expect that of me, you know? I’ve only been here one day! So, just things like that. Teachers expecting things of me and I, you know, was like, why are they expecting something? I’ve only been in Australia two weeks! You know, so if they had at least known, then they wouldn’t have done that. I mean, I don’t hold it against them… (Rachel p.10).
5.6 Suggestions to help make the transition smoother.

When considering assistance for Third Culture Kids, discretion is essential as the TCK is, most likely, already feeling vulnerable. Thus, both support services and general class room interaction need to avoid drawing specific attention to the TCK. With this in mind, the following points were identified as possible interventions or actions schools could adopt or modify to assist in making the transition process smoother.

- Develop a carefully planned mentor/buddy program. The buddy or mentor could be an older TCK, or even just a Third Culture person. However, it is not ideal to simply allocate a buddy from the student body, with no overseas experience, as they will not be able to relate effectively (Ben, Matthew)
- Provide an opportunity for debriefing, where the new TCK is given an opportunity to find out “what is going to happen”. These sessions could include information about Melbourne, discussion of new school routines, and an outline of some of the emotions the new TCK is likely to experience
- Use a student guide, rather than an adult, when first touring the school so that the TCK can get a student’s perspective of life in the College (Matthew)
- Provide a central support person to answer practical questions, for example: how to access second hand books (Matthew)
- Provide academic testing to help determine any educational gaps that may have arisen due to moving schools (Sarah)
- Ensure that teachers are given basic background information for each TCK before they arrive in the classroom. This information could include: where
the student has come from, suggestions on how to support the TCK during the transition and an outline of basic academic expectations (Rachel)

5.7 Specific Transition Program

5.7.1 Initial response

Reaction to questions relating to a need for a specific school based transition program was generally positive, although a number of the participants had some initial reservations. Concerns relating to a fear of increasing existing vulnerability and a strong desire not to be singled out among the new peer group were evident. Upon reflection of their own transition experience, most participants felt that any support should be forward looking and offered in a way that was not obvious to other members of the school community. While reflecting on the one on one support Ben received from the school, he commented on the importance of discretion.

I don’t think anyone knew that I actually went to those (information sessions). … if kids know that you’re going away to learn about which side of the road to drive on then it could be a bit embarrassing and you stick out … Definitely discreet (Ben p.11).

The participants all identified the individuality of each TCK’s transition experience. Thus, any transition program developed by schools needs to respect the individual differences of the TCKs involved. TCKs also need to be given options regarding
the type of support they may choose to access, whether that be one on one support, small group support or both.

A benefit of a specific school based transition program was identified by Matthew. He felt that asking for help is “just too embarrassing” (Matthew p.6) as no-one wants to look like they’re weak. Thus, an organized program is a “really good idea” as it enables TCKs to access support in a less threatening manner.

5.7.2 Mentor

One on one support in the form of a mentor was mentioned by all of the participants. The ideal mentor was seen as an older Third Culture Kid or even a Third Culture Adult. This person would have knowledge and experience relating to the difficulties and challenges of readjusting to the new culture. They would also be someone who could answer specific questions and assist in clarifying cultural differences and norms. They are also, as Ben suggests, someone “who knows what’s happening and can reassure you that this is what happens, that you’re not going off your nut!” (Ben p.10)

For the mentor or buddy to be effective, the TCK ideally should not be paired with a non-TCK, as they will have great difficulty relating to each other. Rachel’s experience of finding it easier to relate to other TCKs is shared by the other participants:
I was good friends with … other (TCKs) at different stages, so that was really helpful, I think that was good. I found those people easy to relate to (Rachel p.8).

### 5.7.3 Small group

Ben and Rachel were initially concerned about the logistics and potential effectiveness of running small group sessions for TCKs. However, all of the participants indicated that there is some benefit from being able to spend time with other TCKs. These benefits include making new connections and links with other people who could understand at least part of the TCK experience, thus helping with readjustment. Matthew felt that a small group for TCKs could be used for “fun sessions” (Matthew p.6) where the TCKs could spend time together learning about local culture, transport, shopping, libraries and general public facilities. However, Rachel indicated that any small group sessions should not be run as “an MK support group” (focus group p.5). TCKs already feel vulnerable, so stating that they need help may act as a negative influence. Rachel also felt that it is best to avoid asking “deep questions in big groups”, again, due to feelings of vulnerability. Small groups offer an opportunity for TCKs to share part of their story, as long as their individuality and privacy is respected.

Small group sessions should be conducted in such a way that minimal to no attention is drawn to the TCKs. Sarah and Matthew suggested that school lunch times could be an effective and discrete way to meet. Matthew also stated that small group sessions should not be run during class time as this only highlights
differences between TCKs and their peers. Ben also felt that any small groups established should not include non-TCKs from the student body as they will be unable to relate to the TCK experience. Sarah also indicated that small groups could be important during the first week in the new school as they could assist in providing necessary support.

Jake indicated that it “would probably be a lot easier” (Jake p.6) if there was a specific transition program, it is important for the program to be forward looking, rather than “always remembering back” (focus group p.5) to the past. Thus, any transition program needs to have a forward focus, with the flexibility to deal with any issues that may arise from the past.

5.8 The positives of being a Third Culture Kid

When you ask me now, I have to say yes. If you asked me during Year Ten, I probably would have been a bit more shaky. But no, I do think that I’ve benefited a lot (from being a TCK) (Ben p.12).

Upon reflection, all of the participants viewed being a Third Culture Kid as a very positive experience. Being a Third Culture Kid is a life changing experience that impacts all areas of life, from relationships and self awareness through to study choices and future career paths. Benefits identified include:

- awareness of different cultures (Jake, Ben, Rachel)
- easier to make new friends due to moving around a lot (Jake)
• an appreciation of a sense of freedom experienced in Third World countries (Jake)

• providing a goal to work towards – medical work on the mission field (Matthew)

• the experience of an exciting and sometimes dangerous lifestyle, and the insight this brings for your own personal life (Rachel)

• awareness of poverty and need (Matthew, Rachel)

• development of a flexible, sometimes laid back, approach to life. Aware that things don’t always fit a time schedule (Rachel)

• ability to relate to people of varying cultural backgrounds (Ben)

All of the participants felt that moving around was, overall, a positive experience as it brings new friends, experiences and opportunities. A common positive outcome of being a TCK was the ability to relate to people of different cultural backgrounds. For example, Ben indicated he could “understand new Vietnamese immigrants …, not just what it's like for them but why they miss their families so much and stuff like that” (Ben p.12).
5.9 Impact of TCK experience on tertiary study and career choices

The experience of being a Third Culture Kid has had an apparent life long impact on the participants. Each has chosen a course of study that leads into areas of interest that are strongly related to their TCK experience.

For Matthew,

having lived in places I have and seeing all that, the gross lack of healthcare and resources and whatever else. That was one big contributing factor in me wanting to work in some sort of health area. That’s probably the main thing. I’ve sort of always been interested in becoming a doctor on and off, since I was five (Matthew p.10).

Jake’s experiences of the jungles of Irian Jaya have affected his career choices “heaps. Like being in Irian you’re always outside in the jungle in the environment there and I guess that’s what has made me interested in Park Management” (Jake p.7).

Ben’s study choices have been impacted by his overseas experiences as much as they possibly could have! Yeah whenever I look at anything…I suppose when I pick subjects I pick subjects that I’ll enjoy and studying about other countries and other cultures, especially when there’s such a focus on South-East Asia at Melbourne University, doing Commerce, then I find it very interesting (Ben p.11).
Ben also noted the impact of his TCK experience on his relationships at university:  
I have a lot more relationships with people from other countries. Especially at uni I find myself more interested in having relationships with people who actually, when you say, oh well, I’ve been there, they relate, and they’re interested, and they want to know what you think about their country (Ben p.12).

Sarah’s love of children and “passion to become a missionary” (Sarah p.7) have guided her career path, strongly influencing her decision to become a Primary School Teacher.

Rachel has seen a lot of poverty, thus she sees “money making careers as quite useless.” She feels that nursing is a way she could help:  
I saw, you know a lot … it really has had a big impact on my career choices because I really wanted a job with people, because if the job’s quite boring, just sitting in an office or whatever, and I can just see so many needs around the world, and I suppose nursing is one way to deal with that (Rachel p.12).

5.10 Reflections of participation in this study.

Feedback from the participants following their involvement in this study was very positive. For Rachel, her involvement brought back memories. She indicated that the discussions had been good and it was fun talking to others and hearing that others have similar things to say. Jake felt it was good to look back and see how much positive change and readjustment he had experienced since arriving in
Australia. Matthew was encouraged to see how far he had moved forward. He is no longer thinking about the past every day and found it “good to be able to recall memories” (focus group p.8).
6. SUMMARY

A key issue identified by the participants as significant during their transition into secondary education in Melbourne, Australia, was the desire to be treated as individuals who do not wish to appear different from their peers. The participants displayed a strong need for anonymity, as identified by Kidd & Lankenau (2001), combined with a need to feel a sense of connectedness (Fuller 1998) with their new peers.

The importance of study in this area was highlighted by Ben when he commented on the need for Third Culture Kids to know that what they are experiencing is normal and that they are not “going a bit nuts!”

The five transition stages suggested by Pollock (2000 & 2001) formed an effective framework for helping to identify and understand aspects of the participants’ experiences. The TCKs interviewed were able to identify parts of the involvement and leaving stages as they prepared to depart for Australia. The key focus, however, was on the transition, entering and reinvolve ment stages, as this is where the school in Australia had a significant impact.

The process of returning to, or entering Australia was noted as a difficult, or even traumatic time for most the participants, as identified by Stuart (1992). Given the participants’ sense of identity is formed from both within their person as well as by the cultures in which they have lived (Hoare 1991), issues of identity confusion were noted following the change of cultures. Most of the participants identified a
strong link with a TCK culture itself, while two participants also indicated an association with a mix of different cultures. Stresses relating to adolescence, including concerns about peer relations (Frydenberg 1997), were also evident, but were difficult to separate from those associated with the change of culture. A sense of personal crisis and social disintegration (Liebkind and Kosonen 1998) was also evident, to varying extents and times, for most of the participants following their change of culture. This crisis was evident in a number of forms, including withdrawal, anger, mild depression, tears or longing to go back - for life to be as it was before the change.

Pollock’s (2000) notion that identity and belonging are influenced by a basic understanding of cultural rules was evident for a number of the participants. For example, one of Matthew’s teachers in the Northern Territory called him a “goose” and “an idiot” in a joking manner. This had a devastating effect on Matthew until he had a greater understanding of the cultural norms. This also highlighted the difficulty some of the TCKs had in objectively interpreting other people’s reality, given their own bias or experience (Hoare 1991).

The participants agreed that having a similar physical appearance to their Australian peers most likely contributed to other people’s misplaced expectations that they would have some understanding of local culture. However, the participants did not realize this at the time. As hidden immigrants (Pollock & Van Reken 2001), the participants felt that teachers, students and extended family members assumed they had some understanding of local and school culture, when often they did not.
The primary factor that influenced the length of the adjustment period, or reinvolvement, was the time taken to make a personal decision to accept the change of circumstances and move on. This process took anywhere between six months and three years. It was not uncommon for the participants to think about their overseas experiences everyday during this stage. Other factors that helped the participants to move on included: specific overseas events such as friends’ graduations, the age at which the TCK returned, and a sense of connectedness with peers and family. While Foyle (1993) identified the Middle School years as the most difficult time for reentry, this was not necessarily supported by the participants. The participants who returned during the Middle School years tended to find the transition easier than those who returned during the higher year levels.

The study identified the importance of supporting the TCKs during their transition, entering and reinvolvement phases. When asked about the need for a specific transition program, the participants were generally positive, although some reservations were raised. Fears of increasing existing vulnerability and a strong desire not to be singled out among the new peer group were evident. Upon reflection of their own transition experience, most participants felt that any support should be forward looking and offered in a way that was not obvious to other members of the school community. One on one support from a mentor, as suggested by Pollock (2000), and the establishment of small groups were identified as possible elements for a transition program.

Appropriate mentors were identified by the participants as other TCKs or adult TCKs, who were capable of understanding the complexity and individuality of the issues involved. They were also seen as an information source, providing much
needed cultural knowledge, for example, background information about local sporting culture, or how to use public transport. The mentor, ideally, should also be able to provide information on how to access support for school based items and services, such as uniform, second hand books and access to counselling if required. Mentoring, while helping to provide a sense of connectedness with the school community, needed to be offered in a way that respected the TCKs individuality, taking into account the need to respect privacy and a desire not to appear different from the other students. The mentor ultimately assists in equipping the new students with the necessary skills, knowledge and ability to successfully progress through the transition (Alvidrez & Weinstein 1993).

The participants felt that small groups might offer an opportunity for TCKs to share part of their story and may assist in making new connections and links with other people who could understand at least part of the TCK experience, thus helping with readjustment. While there was some initial concern about the logistics and potential effectiveness of running small group sessions for TCKs, all of the participants felt that there is some benefit from being able to spend time with other TCKs. As identified by Bowman (2001), the participants’ greatest sense of belonging tended to occur when they were among other TCKs. Thus, to be effective, it was suggested that small groups should not include non-TCKs from the student body, as they would be unable to relate to the TCK experience. It was also felt that small groups could be used in a positive, fun way, where the TCKs could spend time together learning about local culture, transport, shopping, and general public facilities, rather than as a specific “support group.” Small group sessions could be conducted at lunchtime, rather than during class time, as this was seen as an effective and discrete way to meet. Small groups could also be important during
the first week in the new school, as they could assist in providing necessary support.

In summary, the following specific recommendations for practice have arisen from the participants’ stories:

- approach each TCK as an individual who does not wish to appear different from their new peers
- provide a mentor or buddy, who is preferably another TCK, to act as a support and to answer specific transition questions
- use a student guide, rather than an adult, when a TCK first tours the school, so that the TCK can get a student’s perspective of life in the College
- provide academic testing to help determine any educational differences that may have arisen as a result of changing schools
- ensure teachers are given basic background information for each TCK before they arrive in the classroom, including: where the student has come from, suggestions on how to support the TCK during the transition and an outline of basic academic expectations. However, teachers should not draw too much attention to the TCK (Gillies 1998).

Each of the participants displayed an amazing ability to rebound from the lows and maintain a sense of who they are as a person (Fuller 1998). Their resilience, aided by strong support from family, other TCKs and peers, is evident in their unanimous view that being a Third Culture Kid is a very positive experience (Foyle 1993). An increased awareness of other cultures, the excitement and freedom of living in Third World countries, an ability to make new friends and an awareness of poverty and need in the Third World has greatly influenced the participants’ tertiary study
and future career choices. Often the experiences of TCKs can be viewed from a
deficit model. However, it is apparent that the experience and challenge of having
to adjust to different cultures has helped develop and strengthen the participants’
resilience. Investigation of this phenomenon is beyond the bounds of this study.
Future research, however, could investigate factors and events that increase the
resilience of TCKs.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Request to Participate (Plain Language Statement)

A qualitative investigation of the educational and socialization needs “Third-Culture Kids” perceive as being significant during their transition into secondary education.

Dear

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Ms. Desma Strong (supervisor) and Mr. Tim Martin (research student) of the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. Your name and contact details have been drawn from the Donvale Christian School’s records as potential participants. This project will form part of Mr. Martin’s Master of Student Welfare thesis, and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The aim of this study is to investigate the transition process experienced by students returning to education in Melbourne following an extended period of time overseas. It is hoped the study will identify areas of success and also areas for improvement in relation to the support and transition programs offered by the new school. Should you agree to participate, you would be asked participate in an interview of about 60 minutes, to talk about your experiences of returning to school in Australia and to discuss ways in which the transition could have been assisted. With your permission, the interview would be tape-recorded so that we can ensure that we make an accurate record of what you say. When the tape has been transcribed, you would be provided with a copy of the transcript, so that you can verify that the information is correct and/or request deletions. You may be asked to participate in a follow up 30 minute taped interview to clarify issues raised during the first interview. We estimate that the time commitment required of you would not exceed 2 hours.

We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity, however, you should note that as the number of people participating in the study is small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you.

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be made available to you by the researchers. It is also possible that the
results will be presented at academic conferences and in missionary journals. The data will be kept securely in the Faculty of Education for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

Should you be willing to participate, please contact Mr. Martin: 9723 6155 or Ms. Strong: 8344 0976. We will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and location for the interview. A consent form will also be mailed to you.

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 7507, or fax: 9347 6739.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy Martin
Appendix B: Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Consent form for persons participating in research projects

PROJECT TITLE: A qualitative investigation of the educational and socialization needs "Third-Culture Kids" perceive as being significant during their transition into secondary education.

Name of participant:

Name of investigator(s): Ms Desma Strong, Mr Tim Martia

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which, including details of interviews, have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the researcher or his or her assistant to use with me the interview referred to under (1) above.

3. I acknowledge that:
   (a) the possible effects of the interview have been explained to me to my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;
   (c) the project is for the purpose of education research.
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to legal requirements.
   (e) as the number of people participating in the study is small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify me.

4. I consent to the audio-taping of the interviews and acknowledgement that copies of transcripts will be returned to me for verification.

5. I acknowledge that I will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

(Participant)

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

(Witness to consent) (if required – see section 7 of guidelines)

Parent / Guardian to complete (if under 18 years of age):

Name of parent (s) / Guardian(s):

As Parent / Guardian I have read the information in the Plain Language Statement and the above Consent Form and permit ______________ (name of participant) __ to participate in this research project.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

(Parent / Guardian)

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

(Parent / Guardian)

Department of Learning and Educational Development
Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne Parkville Victoria 3052 Australia
Telephone: +61 3 9344 0955 (Queensberry St) +61 3 9344 8334 (Alice Hoy Bid)
Fax: +61 3 9344 0995 (Queensberry St) +61 3 9347 2468 (Alice Hoy Bid)
Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Questions

One-on-one Semi-structured Interview - Outline of Questions.

The experience of Third Culture Kids entering secondary education in Melbourne, Australia.

Setting the scene (5 – 10 minutes)

1) Please briefly describe your overseas experience, including:
   • how old you were when you left Australia (or where you were born),
   • where you have lived
   • type of school attended (eg day/boarding school, American, International…)
   • description of what school was like overseas (eg class sizes, relationships with teachers & peers…)

2) When did you return to Australia?
   • year returned to Australia (eg 1998)
   • year level entered when returned to Australia

Description of reentry (30 - 40 minutes)

1) Can you describe some of the feelings and thoughts you had about returning to (or starting) school in Australia?
2) What was your initial contact with school like?
3) Can you describe your first day – what were some of your concerns?
4) What were the first few weeks like? In what ways did you feel supported?
5) Can you describe how the relationships with your peers developed? Did you feel any of them understood your experience? How did you know this?
6) In what ways did you feel different to or the same as your peers?
7) Were there any other students with a similar background? If so, did this help the transition? How?
8) How was the new school different from previous school(s)?
9) What things were the same?
10) Do you think your school results were affected as a result of returning to Australia/Melbourne? How?

11) What could the school have done differently to help make the change easier?
   Specifically:
   i) Teachers?
   ii) Support staff?
   iii) Administration staff?

12) Do you think schools need a specific transition program? If so what should it include? What should it avoid? Or if not, why not?

*Life after secondary school* (10 - 15 minutes)

1) When did you graduate from Year 12? (eg. 2000)

2) How old were you when you finished Year 12?

3) What have you done since graduating from secondary college? Or What are you planning to do?
   - Further study?
   - Employment?

4) How has your cross cultural experience affected your career path/job choices?

5) How has your cross cultural experience affected your personal relationships?

6) How do you think you have benefited from your cross-cultural experiences?

7) How could schools benefit from your experience?
Appendix D: Focus Group Interview Questions

*Focus Group Interview - Outline of Questions.*

The experience of Third Culture Kids entering secondary education in Melbourne, Australia.

1) **Pre-departure:**
   - How did you feel about coming / returning to Australia?
   - Did your family talk about the coming changes?
   - What happened before you left?
   - What did you think before you left?
   - What did you fear before you left?
   - Who did you talk to before you left?

2) **Arrival in Australia:**
   - Period of adjustment: how long does it take to “adjust”?
   - What factors influence the length of the adjustment period?
   - What impact did having brothers / sisters have on adjustment?
   - How important is “family” in adjusting?

3) Do you think schools need a specific **transition program**?
   - If so what should it include?

4) Do you think that your physical appearance (looking like an Australian) had an impact on other people’s expectations of you? How?

5) How is the transition process affected by adolescent related issues?

6) Cultural identity: How would you describe your cultural identity? (which culture(s) do you identify with the most? Why? When??)

7) Positives: Looking back from your tertiary experience, what are some positives of your experience?

8) What issues have been touched by talking about the process of coming (back) to Australia?

9) Any other issues you’d like to raise?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


www.online.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/485646/ir/task1_4.html

Access Date: 2 October 2001


Access Date: 6 October 2001


Access Date: 2 October 2001

http://www.tck.world.com/useem/art1.html
Access Date: 6 October 2001


Author/s:
Martin, Timothy J.

Title:
The experience of Third Culture Kids entering secondary education in Melbourne, Australia

Date:
2003

Citation:

Publication Status:
Unpublished

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/36833

File Description:
The experience of Third Culture Kids entering secondary education in Melbourne, Australia

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.