

DISCIPLING THIRD CULTURE KIDS

You know you are a TCK when you are asked to finish the sentence “I am most comfortable when...” and you think of visiting souks and mixing with people of different nationalities.

TCK, for the uninitiated, stands for Third Culture Kid. One sociologist, David C. Pollock, defines a TCK as “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture”.

During my 46 years I have lived in five countries, moved fourteen times, had 23 bedrooms and learned four languages. After travelling to sixteen different countries in a hospitality role with an airline, I found my calling in teaching, and am currently based in the Arab world teaching computers and technology at an international Christian school. My passion is for mentoring and equipping TCKs to become life-long followers of Christ.

I grew up in India but my ancestors were actually from China. They were invited to the western part of India to plant tea, and decided to stay there and raise their family. Their children came to know Christ in a powerful way and thus began a long line of pastors and educators. My earliest memories are of growing up in Pauri, a quiet little hamlet in the Himalayas where my parents were mission workers; you could always find me sitting up in the plum tree in summer or down by the streams picking blackberries. There were also wild animals (leopards and tigers) roaming around, just enough to scare me out of my

skin while providing me with a delicious sense of adventure.

At the age of five, I was sent to live with my grandparents in Allahabad, a city in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, so that I could attend day school. My grandparents were both doctors with the Leprosy Mission, and I loved spending time with the rehabilitated patients and hanging out with missionaries from all over the world and listening to their stories.

My grandfather loved talking to me about his faith. He also told me about his great-grandfather, a farmer who went to Delhi to buy seeds at a market, but got caught up in a riot and was wrongfully arrested and sent to prison in Calcutta. While in prison, my ancestor was introduced to Jesus Christ by a guard, and was eventually released to work for William Carey on his printing press. This young man, on fire for God, ended up influencing his whole family for the Lord.

My approach to teaching isn’t quite mainstream: I mix self-directed learning with theology and technology, and use a project-based perspective. This approach enables my students to enjoy the challenge of learning and also to gain genuine understanding of the Gospel message.

This outside-the-box approach all began with something I discovered while teaching Tongan children maths in Auckland. It was thought they had a poor grasp of maths due to their limited understanding of English;

however, I soon discovered that the problem lay not with language but with cultural understanding. The children hadn't adjusted to the different teaching styles, and were unfamiliar with the skills needed to set their own goals and work towards them. Once we figured out a way to help them in this area, their math skills immediately improved.

Soon afterwards I moved to Bangladesh, where I taught at an international mission school for two years. I allowed the children to set their own goals then guided them to work towards achieving them. This way the children had an opportunity to test the principles taught to them. If they learned about seeds and the parable of the sower, they had to come up with a project to plant seeds, sell what they grew, and give away the proceeds to a charity. It was fascinating to watch a class of seven-year-olds plan and design a business and run it almost on their own. One of the local charities we gave to is still supported by the children at this school.

I used the same self-directed approach outside the school, in the programme we ran for refugee Bihari children (their parents had moved to Bangladesh during the partition and they still lived in refugee camps). In my wildest dreams I had never imagined that I would have an opportunity to take the Gospel to these kids, but when I mixed self-directed learning with theology and technology, they just revelled in it.

When I returned to New Zealand two years later, I enrolled at the University

of Canterbury in order to unpack these discipleship ideas more, and to test my theory that technology – the new global 'language' – could help in effectively communicating the Gospel.

My next 'testing ground' was a Christian school in Christchurch, in a much more formal setting than I had worked in before. But my students loved the authenticity of this self-directed learning style, and were thrilled to apply it in earthquake-ravaged Christchurch. Through their class projects they raised money for Japan's tsunami survivors, supported a business in Kolkata that offers hope and freedom to women trapped in the sex trade, and helped pay for a Year 12 student's mission trip to India.

Now I am teaching in the Arab world, and enabling my students to develop their potential to impact the Kingdom of God with their innovative ideas. I have also connected with a 4th generation TCK, Patrick Bell, who is developing a business programme



for High School students. We are exploring how to combine his ideas with my ideas, and plan to implement the resulting programme at our school under the title of 'Kingdom Entrepreneurship'.

As a TCK, I struggled with many disruptions in my upbringing, but God has turned my struggles into my strengths. I feel blessed to be able to serve God by providing a creative and innovative learning environment for other TCKs, in the hope that they, too, will end up becoming life-long followers of Christ. ☞

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