

# International school educators and their children

*Implications for educator-parents, colleagues and schools*

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What is the impact of the international school experience on the children of educators who live and study in close proximity with their parents and parents' colleagues? In this study, educators, who are teachers, counselors, specialists and administrators, describe their impressions of the benefits and challenges of this unique expatriate family experience. Many of the challenges are due to the multiple, and sometimes blurred, roles of both the educator-parents and their children. Raising children overseas within the international school context, however, was evaluated by most participants as a positive and rewarding experience for all members of the family.

**KEYWORDS** educators, family roles, global nomads, international schools, Third Culture Kids

## Introduction

International schools (for the purposes of this study are considered to be those schools that define themselves as such, and that appear in the directories of International Schools Services (ISS) (2004) and/or the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) (2004), often employ educator-

Quel impact ont les établissements scolaires internationaux sur les enfants des agents d'éducation qui vivent et étudient à proximité de leurs parents et des collègues de ces derniers ? Dans cette étude, des agents d'éducation, c'est à dire des enseignants, des conseillers pédagogiques et des membres de la direction, partagent leurs impressions sur les avantages et les inconvénients de cette expérience unique parmi les familles expatriées. Plusieurs inconvénients sont dus aux rôles multiples et parfois flous des parents agents d'éducation et de leurs enfants. Cependant, élever des enfants à l'étranger dans le cadre d'un établissement scolaire international a été décrit par la plupart des participants comme étant une expérience positive et enrichissante pour tous les membres de la famille.

¿Cómo afecta la experiencia de la educación internacional a los hijos de educadores que viven y estudian en estrecha proximidad con sus padres y los colegas de sus padres? En este artículo, varios educadores (profesores, pedagogos, especialistas y directores de colegios) describen sus impresiones sobre los beneficios y las dificultades de esta experiencia familiar única de vivir y recibir educación en el extranjero. Muchas de las dificultades se deben a los múltiples (y a veces difusos) roles de los educadores-padres y de sus hijos. La mayoría de los participantes consideraron que educar a hijos en el extranjero en el contexto de un colegio internacional es una experiencia positiva y gratificante para toda la familia.

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couples who are accompanied by children. A major incentive for these parent-educators is the fringe benefit of free, or discounted, tuition for their children (Cambridge, 2002; Hardman, 2001). Consequently, children of educators are enrolled in the school in which their parents are working. A recent online survey of international school directors indicated that, of the total enrollment in a school, typically 5 percent may be children of staff (Zilber, 2004). These numbers are not large; however, this small subgroup of internationally mobile children is being educated in the school building in close proximity not only to their teachers, but also to their parents and their parents' colleagues and/or friends. It is a dynamic about which little is known and, seemingly, even less openly discussed.

A paucity of literature on this topic suggests that educator-couples with children are a positive addition to a school community because they have superior professional performance and can adjust better to the demands of international living (Wolfe, 1993). They have a special commitment and are less likely to leave the school on a whim; they are more likely to extend their contract if the conditions are suitable for their family (Hardman, 2001). Educator-parents have a vested interest in the school. Although their numbers may represent only a small percentage of the total staff, or of the total international school population, it is important to understand the family-work dynamic in order to better serve the needs of these special members of the international school community.

A parallel research study, currently in progress, is analyzing this school life experience from the point of view of the children of the international school educator-parents. The study on which this article is based, however, examines the perspective of the educator-parents and their colleagues about the challenges and benefits inherent in this family-school experience. The purpose of the study was to establish a baseline record of impressions, opinions and attitudes of educators about raising children within the sponsoring group of the international school. Since this subject has received little scholarly attention, the collecting and recording of these commentaries is exploratory and expository in nature in order to give the broadest understanding of perspectives. Conclusions drawn from these findings will identify implications for the international school community and make recommendations for future research.

## **Methodology**

The inquiry for this exploratory study took place in various fora with participants from different international schools. Two separate focus groups were conducted with a total of 23 administrators enrolled in a doctoral

program. They were selected to participate, from among fellow doctoral students to whom I had access, because they had all raised children in international schools. While the participants were American, they represented international schools on each of the continents and typified the variety of sizes and profiles of schools. A similar forum was held through an online graduate course. This virtual class consisted of 14 participants from various international schools who shared their impressions and experiences. Responses from the focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher; responses from the online graduate course were posted on the discussion board for virtual class interaction. Additional fora were held at three international school conferences, where approximately 80 educators (teachers, specialists and administrators) attended workshops conducted by this researcher. I surveyed the participants about the phenomenon of raising children in an international school after making a short presentation of the literature on Third Culture Kids (TCK). For the purposes of this study the terms Third Culture Kid and global nomad are used as synonymous terms 'according to current practice' to mean

. . . the children of expatriates who, raised in a third culture context, are socialized to the third culture rather than to either their parents' culture of origin or the host culture . . . and a person of any age or nationality who has lived a significant part of his or her developmental years in one or more countries outside his or her passport country because of a parent's occupation. (Schaetti, 2004)

The profiles of participants in the focus groups and online courses were known. There was no attempt, however, to identify participants at the conference workshops; it was assumed that they were professionally involved in international education by virtue of their attendance. Furthermore, participants were asked to remove their name tags and not introduce themselves. The rationale for this directive was to reduce inhibitions and hesitancy of expression by removing the possibility of identification with a school community. Thus, the responses were as honest as one could expect in an open forum. No demographic survey was conducted about whether the participants were educators with children or educators as colleagues of those with children.

Participants in the workshops were asked to reflect personally in writing about the advantages and/or disadvantages of having children of educators study at the same international school as their parents. They were then divided into discussion groups where opinions and comments were shared and recorded by a volunteer scribe. Each group then appointed a spokesperson who relayed points of discussion to the facilitator, who

listed them for public view and comment. Responses were collected from the facilitated debriefing, as well as from the handwritten, anonymous reflections.

The responses gleaned from the different fora represent the total, individual and shared perceptions of international school educator-participants about their experiences as parents and/or colleagues of parents with children in the school. The qualitative nature of the data offers insight into the feelings, perceptions, and opinions of the participants. The analysis and interpretation of the findings are related under the main headings of advantages and challenges. Unless otherwise attributed, quotations are from participants in the study.

### **Advantages of raising children in the parents' school**

Six central themes emerged from the analysis of the question about the advantages and benefits of raising children within the international school community: (a) practical benefits, (b) social integration, (c) facility of communication and contact, (d) awareness, familiarity, and understanding of school and students, (e) strong family bonds and interrelatedness, and (f) educators as parent role models.

#### **Practical benefits**

The practical benefits of family members working and studying in the same school include the seemingly obvious fact that parents and children have the same weekly and yearly timetable, calendar, and holidays. This affects the daily family commute to and from work/school, as well as the family holidays together. As one participant said, 'it simplifies life'. Housing and transportation allowances were identified as benefits, as was free school tuition. It was believed that the quality of private and independent school education was higher, and would not be a financially viable option 'back home'.

#### **Social integration**

The social benefits of this chosen lifestyle begin with the tightly bonded school community. This eases the entrée and integration of staff into their new assignment. It typically includes the integration of the children as well. The staff community in international schools usually offers a ready-made support group for adults and children, with a high comfort level, which makes the adaptation easier into what was termed by one respondent 'our second home'. This confirms the observations of Cornille that families who succeed in establishing a social network of support after

relocation are more likely to have a positive adjustment (cited in Caliguri et al., 1998): 'There is a sense of family shared by the faculty.' One online participant, soon to become a parent, responded with pleasure after reading that 'the staff becomes like an extended family for each other, like aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.'

It was felt that, because the child is part of the staff family, they are given special treatment and supervision by colleagues. It is as if 'we are looking out for each other's kids'. The saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' was offered as a metaphoric description of the relationships evidenced in these environments. There is a sense of security 'with mom and dad nearby and a whole staff looking out for my kids'. For educators' children, school is a non-threatening environment where they receive more, or better, attention and care from other teachers; these children feel comfortable and familiar at school, according to the adults. Educator-parents perceive that their children have a higher status in the community because they are the 'children of . . . '.

An additional by-product of such socialization is that children develop positive, yet different, relationships with other adults. Those will often include their current, or future, teachers. This is because they see them at social functions and outside the typical school environment and, thus, learn to interact with these adults on a different comfort level than other children. This can also become a disadvantage, one educator described the awkwardness when a child came home 'to find her teachers dancing on the dining room table'. Nevertheless, these children have no fear or trepidation about teachers. They actually understand that 'teachers are real people too who have their good and bad days'.

### **Facility of communication and contact**

Another identified benefit was the facility of communication and contacts with members of the international school community, including teachers, administrators, non-teaching staff, other students, and other parents as a result of the parents' job, status, and physical presence in the school community. Typically, cordial, collegial, and accessible relationships exist with colleagues, which allow for quick and informal feedback on a child's progress.

Additionally, since parents and children are in the same building, parents can keep an eye on their child in daily two-way communications, since parents and children always know where and how to find the other – whether it be for 'signatures on field trip forms, money, a hug, or a pep talk'. One mother said that having her children in the school allowed her to balance work and family as a working parent. The ease of attending

co-curricular events, such as assemblies, class presentations, and field days was mentioned as an advantage, as was the joy of joining your preschool child at snack time.

Another channel of communication was registered by an administrator-participant who observed that he could get useful feedback via the 'student network' as to how the students perceive the administrator's actions – through his child's comments.

### **Awareness, familiarity, and understanding of school and students**

Staff working inside a school community have a greater awareness, familiarity, and understanding about the school than do outsiders. They are aware of the curriculum, the education process, the expectations, the programs, the daily events, issues, and the personalities in the community. Educator-parents are also more involved in many aspects of after-school life at school. They are more aware of the school resources and often have better access to them. This includes a cognizance of the quality of the other teachers. This latter commentary was admitted with hesitation and reticence; however, based on the affirmation of nodding heads it seems that this sensitive topic is a familiar and accurate admission of reality. Some even admitted to lobbying for (or against) certain teachers for their child. Commentaries included, 'we can guide the education of our children', 'our work aided our children', and 'our kids are the beneficiaries of our work'.

Many educators are becoming more aware of the characteristics and needs of the internationally mobile students who populate our schools – Third Culture Kids (TCKs); however, one educator lamented that her learning about this group came 'late in the game'. This comment suggests that perhaps educators need to receive training earlier in their international career in order to have a positive impact on their children and/or their students. The importance of understanding the TCK experience was emphasized. Although the entire family is enjoying a life of international mobility, it is important to remember that 'we, the parents, are not TCKs, but our children are. Our children's growing-up years differ so greatly from ours.'

### **Strong family bonds and interrelatedness**

Many comments focused on the development of strong nuclear family bonds. Words that were used to describe these families were 'tight', 'bonded', and 'closely-knit'. These families spend much more time

together than other expatriate families. They share common experiences and activities, daily and visual contact, and frequent communication. There are daily updates and personal contacts laced together with many smiles, kisses, and hugs. Some indicated the pleasure of watching their kids in the context of their daily school life, including their assemblies, co-curricular, and classroom activities. This is something most parents can never see.

Such close contact also helps parents follow the educational and social development of their child. 'You get to watch your child grow up' said a few participants. They get to know each and every one of their child's friends at close range. As a result of the shared experiences and activities, there are 'great conversations with our kids' at the dinner table and more shared decision-making. In essence, since the members of the family unit are part of the same 'culture' this, too, facilitates communication.

A commentary from one educator was that all five members of his family would experience similar events at school or in the host country, but each brought their own perspective to the family dinner table conversations. This observation echoes the reflections published in the mother-daughter journal of Dehner and Dehner (2001).

### **Educators as parent role models**

Comments suggested the belief that educators are motivated to learn more about parenting than other parents; it was felt that these educator-parents served as positive role models for other expatriate parents. One educator indicated that teachers who are parents may also become better teachers:

As a parent of children in the school I have become a better teacher and administrator. I feel I have become much more empathetic to the needs of my students and to the needs of my children's elementary teachers. I also dig deeper now in making sure that the lessons I deliver I would consider worthy for my own children.

One comment about the family dynamic was that 'our children get to see us at our work'. It was recognized that not all children have an opportunity to actually see their parents in their professional role and work environment, and that this is an enriching status that also strengthens family bonds. This could very well be the ultimate in parent role-modeling and is perhaps the reason why 28 percent of children of international school educators choose a career in education (Cottrell, 2002). Of all the groups in Cottrell's study, the educator category has the highest number of children following in their parents' footsteps.

The educator-participants in this study identified numerous advantages to raising children in the international schools, but they also identified certain challenges. One comment, which summarized the situation, was that any one of the above-mentioned benefits also has its down-side. For example, the advantage of having quick and easy access to your child's teacher would seem to be a helpful way to team together toward a child's progress. However, when closeness, informality, or insensitivity trespass across professional frontiers, or when roles between community members become blurred, they can become challenges.

### **Challenges of raising children in the parents' school**

Numerous themes emerged from the responses about the challenges: inequality issues, uncomfortable communication, awareness/insider knowledge, conflicts of interest, multiple roles (role-blurring), family overload, implications of socioeconomic status, and, lastly, child-rearing issues.

#### **Inequality by visibility**

There is a feeling of 'fishbowl living' mentioned by the educators. For example, educators' children are perceived as distinctly different from the other children at school; they may also be treated differently by other students and friends. Additionally, an educator-parent's position may affect their child's relationship with other children. This was named the 'My father is the . . . syndrome.' This is particularly acute when the parent is in a high profile position, such as an administrator. In cases where the child must become the student of their own parent, neither seems to like this situation, according to the adults. Some participants felt that their reputation as the parent of 'X' impacted negatively on their teaching.

Many agreed that children of educators seem to be held to higher or different standard by other staff members, or must 'live up to expectations' or 'perform in the above average range'. The children are 'forced into the limelight, whether [they] like it or not'. Some participants even felt that they, themselves, are judged on the basis of their child's behavior, especially if the behavior is not optimal – a stressful situation for the educator as well as for the child. This is related to what Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) call the 'visibility factor', when expatriate families fear that their children's behavior might reflect badly on their professional status with the sponsoring organization. Cottrell (1999) confirmed that TCKs are aware, self-conscious, and cautious of their own behavior in public since they know it could jeopardize the parent's career.



Some participants described feeling a sense of distrust by their colleagues when their children are doing very well, as if perhaps the success was due to favoritism by colleagues. They expressed feeling suspicion during test administrations, or suspicion when their child is selected for a team, award, or special event. There was a feeling of a double standard for children of faculty, as opposed to other students.

### **Unwanted and uncomfortable communication**

Whereas open and frequent communication with colleagues about a child's progress may be advantageous for student success, the participants felt that the challenge arises when the child becomes overly observed and supervised. Thus, the educator-parent may receive immediate feedback about their child's difficulties on a frequent basis or in 'inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times'. Negative or impromptu comments made by colleagues at inopportune times of the work day can have a disheartening effect on the educator-parent.

If the child has behavior or learning difficulties, parent-teacher conferences may become very awkward, colleagues may not be open and honest, or sometimes the problems take on added intensity. Professional relationships can become strained as a result of student-educator-parent issues.

If there are difficulties with a child's friends or their friends' families, or difficult administrator-teacher relationships, these dynamics can cause angst both professionally and personally. Some children of educators may suffer bullying, and become the brunt of gossip and rumors, more than other children. A lament among the educators was that they sometimes are reluctant to 'lobby' for their children, as would other parents who are not employed by the school.

### **Awareness and insider knowledge**

Both the educators and their children have insider knowledge and more awareness than other community members; this was indicated as a challenge. 'We know too much' was one commentary. A major issue for participants was maintaining confidentiality at home about a child's friends or about their teacher/colleagues. Parents must make a concerted effort not to expose certain information. Yet children inevitably overhear things at home to which they should not be privy. They quickly learn to abide by the family rules of confidentiality as they develop an awareness of differentiating loyalties and the social skills necessary to maintain the confidences. Participants commented that this helped develop a precocious maturity in their children.

### **Conflicts of interest**

Participants felt that sometimes conflicts of interest arise between the school and the family. Sometimes decisions taken by the school may not be right for their own child and, if something is wrong, educator-parents find themselves in the awkward position between being an employee and a parent. As employees, educators must endure weaknesses in the school, even if this is to their child's detriment; this may cause feelings of guilt. Educators are very aware of the strong and the weak teachers, and, as mentioned earlier, may try to make special placement requests of the administration. But if they 'resist the urge to pull rank', do not actively lobby for specific teachers, and their child suffers, there is, again, a feeling of guilt.

Participants have openly commented about their concerns regarding who will be their first priority in a crisis – their child or their students. With our current concerns about safety and security in schools, it would be important to understand the internal conflict, self-doubt, and soul-searching which may plague some educator-parents. Sometimes there is even disagreement between the educator-parent couple.

### **Multiple roles**

Educator-parents find themselves playing multiple roles; they are employees of the school and, thus, colleagues of other employees; they are parents and, thus, friends of other parents in the community. The roles may blur between being a parent and an educator; they may blur between being the teacher of students and the teacher of their children's friends; sometimes the roles are affected by confused loyalties between the school and the child, and between employee and parent. These multiple roles become complex, sometimes causing confusion and misunderstandings, especially when there is boundary trespassing or role-blurring. The unpopular and complex situation of teaching your own child in class was cited as confusing for the child, as well as for the parent.

An example of role-blurring is during parent-teacher conferences, especially when the child is not performing or behaving well. One participant questioned whether the reason for an uncomfortable parent-teacher conference was because the teacher communicated in a different manner than she would have if the parent were a non-educator-parent from the outside community. Participants found this to be a complicated situation.

The multiple roles also have an impact on socializing in the community. It is difficult for teachers to make friends with other non-teaching parents because they are always aware that the non-teaching parents are stakeholders in the school community. Sometimes educators feel that their friendships are abused when friendly parents use the educator to press

for inside information or push an agenda. Also, the educator-parent may be excluded from social invitations by non-teaching families because they are always perceived as 'the educator'.

These intertwined roles, comprised of the educator–employee–parent and child–student–friend, may become confusing for the family, as neither parents nor children can easily separate themselves. The intense connections between home and school are particularly exacerbated in a small school community and were described as

. . . work becomes too much of life . . . school becomes an extension of home . . . school is the main environment for a large percent of your life . . . whether at school or at home, you discuss the school

. . . you are very involved in the school as a child, parent and educator'.

The multiple roles were recognized as leading to 'family overload'.

### **Family overload**

In general, no member of the family can get away from the school or from each other; parents sometimes cannot talk openly about all work issues at the dinner table yet, conversely, cannot shut off from school topics. They have very little life outside the school community. This was called 'family overload or overdose', when the school becomes too dominant in the family life and vice versa. 'Claustrophobic' was the term used to describe these sensations. This feeling is echoed by Dehner and Dehner (2001) in the comments 'They say overseas life brings families together, but this might be too close for comfort' (p. 24). The feeling is exacerbated in the teen years when parents might even chaperone dances and field trips. The lack of privacy was noted, especially when the child 'messes up'; even then, the child cannot avoid the discovery of the mistake by the parents.

When one family member has a difficult time it often impacts on all the other members. Participants described this as the 'domino effect'. This may be an example of the combination of family system theory and spillover theory (Caliguri et al., 1998) whereby the expatriate family members influence the efficacy of the working member. 'This effect influences how well he or she is able to perform his or her duties on the global assignment' (p. 324). Caliguri et al. were describing a typical expatriate family situation, where only one member is employed, the other is a non-salaried spouse, and the children are in a third location – at school. However, the educator's family does not have these separated locations; thus, the impact might be even more intense.

In contrast to the practical benefits mentioned at the start, sometimes the family members cannot get away from the school because each member must wait for the other, while they are involved in their extra-curricular responsibilities. This may impose elongated school hours on all members of the family.

### **Implications of socioeconomic status**

The socioeconomic gap between educators and other sponsoring groups in the international school community (i.e. corporate, foreign service, missionary, etc.) was raised as an issue by participants. Some felt that, since educators had a lower salary and poorer benefits and conditions, this impacted negatively on their housing quality and location. Consequently, this made it difficult for their children to socialize with classmates from other sponsoring groups, or from the wealthy students of the host country community.

### **Child-rearing issues**

Some of the challenges were focused on issues of child-rearing. Some felt that their children grow accustomed to having their parents in close proximity, become reliant on them, and, thus, do not develop independence. They rely on their parents to help them, for example, when they forget the signed permission form. Some felt that it is stressful for their child to be around their parents all the time and makes it difficult for them to develop their own identity or rebel. Educators may find it difficult to discipline their own child within the school framework. Also, participants opined that educators tend to have higher expectations for their own children.

### **Issues specific to families of administrators**

While the aforementioned comments relate to international school educators with children, there was a clear sensation that families of administrators, such as directors, principals, and assistant principals, have particularly complex issues because of their high profile. Participants described difficult or sensitive incidents where they had to discipline their own children, students in their child's social circle, and/or children of their friends/colleagues. None of these situations was well received, either by the students or by the adults.

Sensitive school issues, such as labor conflicts, have a strong impact on the administrator's family. For example, if the educator-parent is the

director and has a conflict with, or must dismiss, one of their child's teachers, the child might have to deal with the fallout and 'take some grief' for what might be an unpopular decision. Also, maintaining confidentiality at home is high priority, especially with regard to labor, management, board, or student issues.

The same holds true for the teaching spouse of administrators (Swetz, 2003). The congenial and collegial environment enjoyed by the spouse of an administrator can change in an instant as a result of labor decisions taken by the administrator. Also, conflicts with other parents in the community, especially if they happen to be the parents of your child's friend, could have social implications for the children of the administrator.

As mentioned earlier, some participants felt that friendships made among the parent community were abused as a result of the high-profile status of the administrator, as some parents would lobby and pressure them on certain issues. Conversely, some staff may feel intimidated when the child of their 'boss' is in their class. One participant related two cases of headmasters' children; one had a son who suffered in the limelight of his father's position, and another had a daughter who thrived and was highly successful. Perhaps these children face common pressures that are readily ascribed to Preachers' Kids. Perhaps there is a difference in the reactions based on the gender of the child and the gender of the high-profile parent.

Whereas expatriate parents may feel guilt if their child's adjustment and happiness is less than optimal, administrators particularly feel guilt if the school programs are inadequate. Another cause for guilt is their reluctance to act as an advocate when there is a problem between a teacher and their child. Administrators tend to tread with caution in this arena, whereas any other parent in the community would not hesitate to make their opinions heard.

Children of administrators are perhaps scrutinized even more than other educators' children, especially if they are talented or, conversely, if they are challenged. Doubt and suspicion might be demonstrated when an administrator's child receives awards, prizes, or high grades on examinations or report cards, as if they are deemed privileged due to the position of the parent. One situation was described as reverse discrimination, where the child was deserving of a sports award but the father/coach/administrator had him share it with another, in order to avoid community suspicion. As mentioned earlier, bullying, gossip, and rumors were considered more likely against children of administrators.

## Discussion

If the pros and cons of this unique family lifestyle were evaluated simply by comparing the number of commentaries arising from this study, it would seem that the concept of 'it takes a village to raise a child' was closer to 'it takes a village to *raze* a child'. This observation was mentioned in all the focus and discussion groups – the disadvantage list outnumbers the advantage list. However, when asked if overall the international school educator and family experience was a good one, the general sentiment of the various groups was decidedly positive. 'How so?' one might ask. Perhaps the explanation is as simple as 'positive and negative feelings often co-exist' (Cottrell, 1999: 17) or perhaps the results of a qualitative study cannot be evaluated quantitatively. Participants had an opportunity to describe the challenges and the benefits which were then categorized. If the responses had much agreement, they were categorized under one commentary; however, if the responses were negative personal accounts, they added individually to the list of negatives. It would seem that when offered the opportunity to recount personal histories, participants cited specific cases of unenlightened or insensitive human dynamics; these memories were offered expression and release during the various fora, thus resulting in a longer list.

An interesting and relevant study by Worsham et al. (2003) reported that educators have an enormous impact on their students' choice of career; so do parents. Worsham et al. opine that the teacher shortage in the US might very well be the result of the negative influence of educator-parents on their own children; they do not seem to be encouraging their children to follow in their footsteps toward a career in education. However, in the international school arena, it was found that almost one-third of the children of educators chose a career in education (Cottrell, 2002). This demonstration of filial footstep-following is far greater than the results for adult TCKs of other sponsoring groups (Cottrell and Useem, 1994).

Such studies would suggest a positive family–work–student life experience, if the children choose to continue in their parents' career. It might also suggest that international school educators encourage their children to seek out a career in education. Perhaps the reason is that the children of educators observe their parents at work first hand, as no other child does; perhaps they feel the fulfillment and content that their parents enjoy in their professions; perhaps the positive expatriate family experiences influence them to seek out a repetition of their parents' career – almost as the ultimate form of recognition and flattery. Data from previous

studies would reinforce the general feeling of approbation indicated in this study and might be an interesting topic for future research.

Other recommendations for future research arising from this study would include gender issues in children of high-profile educator-parents, profile comparisons between educator-parents and educators without children, performance and success of children of international school educators, and profile of educators in international schools by nationality.

## **Conclusions**

Hiring ‘career professionals with a family’ is a huge expense for a school (Hardman, 2001). It is also a great responsibility with concomitant risks, as the maladjustment of one member can influence family plans to remain at the school (Hardman, 2001). However, hiring staff with accompanying children also offers a value-added benefit to a school. Educator-parents have a special commitment to the school. As one educator stated:

After all, the school was not only the place where we worked and where our careers lay, but it was – far more importantly – the place where our son grew up. It was to our advantage in every way to make X the best school it could be.

Educator-parents give much to the school because they view it as a stepping stone to the next career move. They are more likely to extend their contract if the conditions are suitable for their children, thus they have a strong and vested interest in the success and quality of the education at the school; they also offer added perspectives to the constituencies in the school community as a result of their multiple roles and ‘cultures’ (Hardman, 2001).

This exploratory study is limited by its sample selection and scope; thus it is not generalizable to all international schools, nor to all educators and their families, nor to any particular nationality of family. It does, however, give us a snapshot of the dynamics and experiences of the participants and should set the stage for continued future inquiry. It should be of great interest to educators embarking on a possible career in international education, to educator couples planning a family overseas, and to their colleagues, administrators, and school counselors. The data gathered focuses on experiences in international schools but it could also be of interest to educators in national systems, who may be working in the same school in which their children are studying. A major difference, however, is that it is not as typical for two parents to be working in the same school building in national schools as it is for international schools.

The analysis of the benefits and challenges suggests that a positive family–work environment is one major benefit. Although the participants clearly expressed their belief that the benefits far outweighed the challenges to this lifestyle, schools should take heed to raise sensitivity and awareness to the challenges. Schools should raise their awareness to the multiple roles played by educator-parents and their children in the school; they should become sensitive to the potential disruptions to constructive employee–educator–colleague–parent–student–child–friend dynamics; schools must talk about these issues openly and in a non-threatening environment through orientation and training sessions; schools must develop strategies to protect the sensitivity of all members of the community.

Resource guides would be helpful in preparing educators who are considering a career in international schools. According to Hartt (1995) schools need not only to orient, mentor, and prepare new staff to the new country and the new school, but also to raise their awareness of the special needs of the students in international schools. This should include special mention regarding the challenges of raising one’s family in the school community. Helpful manuals, such as *The Essential Guide for Teachers in International Schools* (Langford et al., 2002) could include augmented chapters devoted to this subject. Future research, publications, and training may help catalyze discussion and raise sensitivity of the children-students, parent-educators, colleagues, and supervisors.

Schools could publicize information, policies, and practices which would guide members of the community about how to be more sensitive to the situation of the educators and their families. In this way, all categories of educators would be made aware of and sensitive to potential hazards. One commentary from a participant, who is himself an adult TCK, was ‘we must educate the children themselves about the TCK phenomenon. Once they become aware that they belong to a special cultural group with a name, it helps them make sense of their life experiences and develop an identity.’

High-profile educator-parents, such as directors, principals, deans of students or coaches, must be cognizant of the effect of their status on their children and their children’s peers, especially at the middle and high school age groups. The responses about high-profile educator-parent positions are reminiscent of online comments made by ‘Preacher Kids’ (PK) on an internet forum:

It can be a blessing and sometimes a hardship being a PK. Life isn’t easy living under a microscope and subject to gossip within the church community. . . . On the whole I enjoyed it but then I was a show off, so I loved having an ever-



present audience . . . The attention was fun until someone in the church had a problem with your dad, then it all got a bit intense for my liking. (Ship of Fools, 2004)

Judging from the enthusiasm of the participants in the focus groups, discussion groups, and conference workshops, it seems that the opportunity to speak about this topic openly was therapeutic – some said almost cathartic. Some indicated that this was the first time they had been able to address some of the challenges of this unique status of educator-parent. Administrators, counsellors, and faculty must offer opportunities to address these issues and develop school strategies to decrease the potential pitfalls and negative experiences and transform them into positive ones. We must work together to protect and maintain the fragile balance of the multiple roles of our valuable resources – our parent-educators and their own TCKs.

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### **Biographical note**

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