Unit 1: Starting somewhere new

In a world where international careers are becoming commonplace, the phenomenon of third culture kids (TCKs) children who spend a significant portion of their developmental years in a culture outside their parents' passport culture(s) is increasing exponentially. Not only is their number increasing, but the cultural complexity and relevance of their experience and the adult TCKs (ATCKs) they become, is also growing.

When Ruth Hill Useem, a sociologist, first coined this term in the 1950s, she spent a year researching expatriates in India. She discovered that folks who came from their home (or first) culture and moved to a host (or second) culture, had, in reality, formed a culture, or lifestyle, different from either the first or second cultures. She called this the third culture and the children who grew up in this lifestyle 'third culture kids'. At that time, most expatriate families had parents from the same culture and they often remained in one host culture while overseas.

This is no longer the case. Take, for example, Brice Royer, the founder of TCKid.com. His father is a half-French/half-Vietnamese UN peacekeeper, while his mom is Ethiopian. Brice lived in seven countries before he was eighteen including France, Mayotte, La Reunion, Ethiopia, Egypt, Canada and England. He writes, 'When people ask me 'Where are you from?' I just joke around and say, My mom says I'm from heaven.' What other answer can he give? ATCK Elizabeth Dunbar's father, Roy, moved from Jamaica to Britain as a young boy. Her mother, Hortense, was born in Britain as the child of Jamaican immigrants who always planned to repatriate 'one day'. While Elizabeth began life in Britain, her dad's international career took the family to the United States, then to Venezuela and back to living in three different cities in the U.S. She soon realised that while racial diversity may be recognised, the hidden cultural diversity of her life remained invisible.

Despite such complexities, however, most ATCKs say their experience of growing up among different cultural worlds has given them many priceless gifts. They have seen the world and often learnt several languages. More importantly, through friendships that cross the usual racial, national or social barriers, they have also learned the very different ways people see life. This offers a great opportunity to become social and cultural bridges between worlds that traditionally would never connect. ATCK Mikel Jentzsch, author of a best-selling book in Germany, Bloodbrothers- OurFriendship in Liberia, has a German passport but grew up in Niger and then Liberia. Before the Liberian civil war forced his family to leave, Mikel played daily with those who were later forced to become soldiers for that war. Through his eyes, the stories of those we would otherwise overlook come to life for the rest of us.

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Understanding the TCK experience is also important for other reasons. Many ATCKs are now in positions of influence and power. Their capacity to often think 'outside the box' can offer new and creative thinking for doing business and living in our globalizing works. But that same thinking can create fear for those who see the world from a more traditional world view. Neither the non-ATCKs nor the ATCKs may recognise that there may be a cultural clash going on because, by traditional measures of diversity such as race or gender, they are alike.

In addition, many people hear the benefits and challenges of the TCK profile described and wonder why they relate to it when they never lived overseas because of a parent's career. Usually, however, they have grown up cross-culturally in another way, perhaps as children of immigrants, refugees, bi-racial or bi-cultural unions, international adoptees, even children of minorities. If we see the TCK experience as a Petri dish of sorts a place where the effects of growing up among many cultural worlds accompanied by a high degree of mobility have been studied then we can look for what lessons may also be relevant to helping us understand issues other cross-cultural kids (CCKs) may also face. It is possible we may discover that we need to rethink our traditional ways of defining diversity and identity. For some, as for TCKs, 'culture' may be something defined by shared experience rather than shared nationality or ethnicity. In telling their stories and developing new models for our changing world, many will be able to recognize and use well the great gifts of a cross-cultural childhood and deal successfully with the challenges for their persona, communal and corporate good.

Questions 1-6

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the reading passage?

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the information of the writer
FALSE	if the statement contradicts the information of the writer
NOT GIVEN	if there is no information on this

1. There is a close connection between careers and the number of TCKs.
2. An increasing number of people describing themselves as TCKs.
3. Ruth Hill Useem studied children in several countries.
4. Ruth Hill Useem defined the third culture as a mixture of two parents' original cultures.
5. Brice Royer feels that he has benefited greatly from living in many different countries.
6. Elizabeth Dunbar felt that she a culture that was different from most people's.

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Questions 7-13

Complete the table below.

Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the passage for each answer.

THIRD CULTURE KIDS - ADVANTAGES AND RESULTS		
Area	**Advantage for ATCKs**	**Possible result**
Friendships	know how different people (7)……	can act as bridges between worlds that are usually separate
Business	creative thinking	May cause (8)…… among certain people Can lead to (9)…… despite similarities
Whole experience	knowledge of many cultural worlds and a great deal of (10)……	Can teach us about problems faced by (11)…… of all kinds Current ideas of what both (12)…… mean may be considered wrong Belief that culture depends on (13)……

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