Mixed metaphors:
Descriptive representations for transnational students

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ABSTRACT

In an age of increasing levels of dual/multiple citizenship, family members residing on opposite sides of national/international borders, and labour contracts based on short-term visas as examples, it is not surprising that there has been a rise in the number of international/transnational 'families'. International mobility and transitions challenge the adaptive capacity of families collectively and each of their members individually. Progressively, 'metaphors' derived from intercultural observations of the way transnational school-aged children/students adjust/adapt to foreign social and educational environments are being used as tools to gain an improved understanding of the student experience. Concerning the relatively contemporary knowledge surrounding these youth, metaphors can help to express feelings and situations with few words, but much 'symbolism'. From an extensive review of the relevant literature, research on transnational students was found to be mostly anecdotal—biographies and memoirs abound—which has the disadvantage of drawing at random on the circumstances and experiences of a relatively small group who are 'atypical' in relation to the vast majority of the world's young people. This article lists over 50 metaphors and explicates several in detail (i.e., third culture kid, global nomad, cross cultural kid, *kikokushijo*, and parachute and satellite kid). It is envisaged that this discussion will act as a springboard for initiating greater empirical exploration into the growing number of transient youth.

Keywords: international families, metaphors, school-aged children, transnational students

INTRODUCTION

This research was conceptualised within the broader context of a 'globalised' world, where change and discontinuity are mounting features. This article is specifically focused on the existing literature related to transnational students and their education. To advance understanding of how educational sojourners may position themselves within international communities, it is useful to consider a range of perspectives that have sought to examine the different situations they may navigate. In discussing a range of scholarly works, however, it is not the intention of this article to provide an exhaustive précis.

Throughout this paper, 'child', 'children' and/or 'students' refers to the beneficiaries of parental involvement; a heterogeneous population of predominantly school-aged individuals who include pre-schoolers and adolescents between the ages of 2-18 years. International parents 'take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them [children] simultaneously to two or more nation states' (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p. 7). Thus, transnational students cross [multiple] international borders, face disruptive social

and educational experiences, and are forced to acculturate to new conditions (Zuniga & Hamann, 2009). Understandably, the degree to which the students within this population are affected by changes in their social and educational ecologies, understand those changes, and their capacity to respond adaptively, will vary.

BACKGROUND

It has long been held that the early years of a child's development are vitally important and that effective parenting is a component of those critical experiences (Velliaris, 2010). Hence, as the phenomenon of globalisation has emerged—built in part on the immediacy and universality of communication and knowledge networks, and in part on the expanding division of labour expertise and range of 'choice' for individuals in a postmodern world—metaphors have become conceptual tools for, in and of education research (Midgley, Trimmer, & Davies, 2013, p. 1). Metaphors in education enable better understanding of what scholars may not readily identify with and can help to 'sensitise and clarify for the uninitiated new and unfamiliar concepts' (Zilber, 2004, p. 17). The metaphors listed in Table 1 attest to the ongoing evolution in global terminology.

Table 1. Collection of English metaphors for transnational children (adapted Velliaris, 2010; Velliaris & Willis, 2013a)

advanced tourist	*don't-fit student*	*nomadic child*
airport hopper	*global chameleon*	*parachute kid*
astronaut child	*global citizen*	*perpetual outsider*
boomerang kid	*global educational mediator*	*perpetual traveller*
boundary layer people	*global nomad*	*portable identity*
citizen of the world	*global patriot*	*privileged homeless*
complex multicultural child	*global soul*	*professional correspondent*
composite self	*hidden immigrant*	*prototype citizen*
cosmopolitan intellectual	*homeless VIP*	*resident alien*
crazy quilt childhood	*hybrid child*	*rolling stone*
cross cultural fusion	*hyphenated*	*rubber-band nationality*
cross cultural kid	*impermanent resident*	*satellite kid*
cultural bridge	*interactive cosmopolitan*	*sociocultural interpreter*
cultural chameleon	*intercontinental wanderer*	*third culture child*
cultural entrepreneur	*intercultural entrepreneur*	*third culture kid*
cultural nomad	*intercultural kid*	*touring aristocrat*
cultural translator	*intercultural translator*	*transit lounger*
culturally calibrated	*international beacon*	*transitional cosmopolitan*
culturally marginal	*multicultural composite*	*transnational youth*
culturally mixed	*multi-faceted life*	*unaccompanied minor*
diplomatically immune	*multinational soul*	*world fusion*
disciple of life	*new elite*	*world wanderer*
	new world fusion	

SELECTED METAPHORS

Over a decade ago, Beare (2001, p. 12) regarded the rapidly changing world of the 21st Century as emerging as 'borderless'. Beare (2001) proposed that as future citizens, children would be living in multinational/multicultural global networks and that changes could have extraordinary implications for families, schools and communities in ways that may prove culturally destabilising. While the disruption associated with any relocation or repatriation may be troublesome, it is usually manageable in the short-term. Not so immediately obvious are 'what might be considered the less positive and generally less tangible effects of such a [lifestyle]' (Nette & Hayden, 2007, p. 436). From an extensive review of the relevant literature, six metaphors have been extrapolated and are briefly elucidated below.

(1) Third Culture Kid

The expression 'Third Culture Kid' (TCK) was introduced when two social scientists, J and R Useem, travelled to India in the 1950s to study Americans deployed there predominantly as corporate, governmental, military and missionary personnel (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). The TCK term stemmed from the apparent commonality of challenges, characteristics, perceptions and tendencies amongst the Useem's three sons and other American children observed in India. The Useems recognised that their children's year-long experience during their formative years, left an indelible mark on their development, whereby their sense of belonging became more '*relationship*-based' than '*geography*-based' (McLachlan, 2007, p. 235). The TCK term implied that the Useem's children had a strong attachment to the Western (United States) sojourners in India with whom they shared this life experience. The TCK definition came to represent Western children who had spent their developmental and school-aged years outside their parents' culture, building a relationship to a non-Western culture, while never developing full ownership of either. In this construct, TCKs tended to be raised in a culture, relocated to another, and repatriated back. That is, TCKs integrated aspects of their birth culture—*first culture*, and their new culture—*second culture*, and created a personally blended 'other' culture—*third culture* unique to them as individuals (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 20). R Useem posited that TCKs found that their values and behaviours did not fit with the stereotypical characteristics of their American home culture. Throughout their impressionable adolescence, their sons absorbed cultural, linguistic and behavioural norms, as well as a frame of reference *different to*, but *assembled from*, what the parents regarded as the Indo-American *third* culture in which they were living (R. Useem, 1966, p. 145). That is, they became more comfortable occupying the *space* between the practices of *home* and *host* cultures, otherwise known as the cultural 'third place' (J. Useem, Useem, & Donoghue, 1963; R. Useem, 1966).

(2) Global Nomad

McCaig (1992, 1994) defined 'Global Nomad' (GN) as a person of any age or ethnicity who has lived a significant part of their developmental years in one or more countries outside their passport country because of a parent's occupation. McCaig (1992, p. 1) paired the word *global* emphasising the individual's 'global awareness, skills of adaptation, appreciation of cultural diversity, adventuresome spirit and willingness to risk change' with *nomad* emphasising the 'sense of belonging everywhere and nowhere, indecisiveness, uncertain cultural identity and difficulty with commitment which can be the legacy of high mobility'. The term was born at an international school in India where McCaig had spent time as a boarding student (cited in Thompson, 2009, pp. 36-37). An unspecified number of years later when she was invited to that school's reunion, she pondered why she should attend when she may potentially not recognise anyone. It occurred to her that as soon as she was reunited with her fellow alumni, she would feel at 'home'. They too would

be GNs who would identify with the same shared perspective or cultural 'third place' (J. Useem, et al., 1963; R. Useem, 1966).

Together with R Useem, McCaig championed the globally mobile student community. She was the first to recognise the importance of helping GNs re-enter their home country and envisioned a 'GN Club' at every college/university across the United States (US). McCaig encouraged educational institutions to be aware of their special status and allow individuals to designate themselves as GNs on their application documentation, because in relation to skills in intercultural communication, diplomacy and the ability to manage diversity, 'global nomads are probably better equipped than others' (McCaig, 1994, p. 33). Hence, the potential benefits of this unique upbringing may be far-reaching. The competences of GNs are associated with their ability to move beyond the boundaries of a given culture, to question those boundaries, and perhaps even to recognise their cultural constructedness (Ahmed, 1999, p. 337).

(3) Cross Cultural Kid

In 2007, Van Reken and Bethel attempted to reconceptualise the TCK concept and introduced the term 'Cross Cultural Kid' (CCK). From their research, they spoke with individuals who identified themselves as TCKs, but who were concerned that they did not fit the 'original' model. With this in mind, the CCK term was set-up to be more encompassing of all the children who could be experiencing a transient TCK-type lifestyle, including: (1) traditional TCKs; (2) domestic TCKs; (3) international adoptees; (4) immigrant children; (5) refugee children; (6) intercultural children; and (7) other children of cultural minorities. A prime example of the growing complexity of transnationalism experienced by some CCKs was provided by the personal experience of Cockburn (2002, p. 479) who was asked to provide parenting and child behaviour management strategies to an Indonesian woman married to a Japanese man residing in Singapore. It soon became apparent that their views and experiences were so different that their children were confused by the discrete expectations made by each parent. The *mother* herself was from a more vibrant and expressive culture where feeling and emotions were frequently demonstrated, whereas, the *father* believed that children simply 'raise themselves' and should remain quiet. Additionally, these parents were influenced by local Singaporean parents who tended to be quite punitive in their disciplinary style (Cockburn, 2002).

(4) Kikokushijo

The children of Japanese parents who were transferred overseas and have since repatriated are considered to be *kikokushijo* or 'returnee' children (Fry, 2007; Kanno, 2000, 2003; Yoshida et al., 2003; Yoshida et al., 2002). The term was first used in the late 1960s by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), for the purpose of establishing policies to deal with the rising number of predominantly 'elite' Japanese children returning home after several years abroad, as well as the problems associated with their social and education development (Kamada, 2000, p. 28). *Kikokushijo's* degree of Japaneseness was seen to be influenced by such factors as whether their sojourn was: in an industrialised or developing country; whether they attended full-time Japanese schooling; the language spoken in the host country; and the age range during which they lived overseas, to name but a few (Befu, 2003, p. 131).

Kikokushijo have spent time outside Japan during their formative or 'most linguistically impressive years' (Kamada, 2000, p. 33) and typically find it daunting—to *differing* degrees—to re-assimilate into 'mainstream' Japanese society. They are said to have lost their 'Japaneseness' and the fading of language and self-awareness of being Japanese results in 'incompleteness' or 'contamination' (Fry, 2007, p. 132). Potential sources of 'otherness' are distinguishable by their fashion, hair, make-up,

ways of talking and walking, as well as different 'behavioural signs' such as eye contact, facial expressions and gestures often 'gave them away' as returnees. 'Interpersonal styles' were also different, with returnees indicating that they had problems with Japanese 'manners of speaking' especially with honorific Japanese language (Yoshida, et al., 2002, p. 430). *Kikokushijo*, especially those who have lived in Western cultures for an extended period of time, tended to be more assertive and individualistic (Miyamoto & Kuhlman, 2001). In general, the prototypical image of *kikokushijo* are strange individuals with a mix of East and West; Japanese on the outside and foreigner on the inside (Kanno, 2000, p. 363). Negative labels evolved over the years to include: *non-japa* [non-Japanese]; *han-japa* [half-Japanese]; *shin-japa* [new-Japanese]; and even *hen-japa* [strange-Japanese] (Befu, 2003, p. 131; Fry, 2007, p. 132).

Kikokushijo's potential to contribute—via language and intercultural skill-related areas—has increasingly become valued rather than deemed as something that separates them from mainstream society. In particular, the negative perception of *kikokushijo* as possessing incompetent Japanese language skills, has switched to a positive one linked to their mastery of a foreign language, usually English (Fry, 2007; Podolsky, 2004). As their acquisition of foreign patterns of language and behaviour may alienate them from their Japanese teachers and peers, these children are often sent to international schools that are more accepting of their [Westernised] character traits (Velliaris & Willis, 2013b, 2014). The image of *kikokushijo* has shifted, albeit slowly, under Japan's national commitment to globalisation. Fortunately over time, the perceived *negative* attributes of these children as culturally ambiguous or 'educational refugees' (Fry, 2007, p. 134) has been exchanged for *positive* perceptions of them as enjoying global awareness.

(5) Parachute Kid

Immigration trends over the past decade suggest that greater numbers of children are immigrating alone to live and study abroad (Min, 2006). Reports indicate that the majority of parachute kids come from Taiwan, followed by South Korea, Hong Kong, and China, while smaller numbers come from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (Zhou, 1998), primarily to obtain primary and secondary education abroad. This new group involves minors from several Asian countries immigrating overseas and who may reside: (a) alone; (b) with a relative; (c) with a family friend; and/or (d) with an unrelated paid caregiver. These 'parachute kids' can be as young as eight years old, but the majority are between 13-17 years (Chiang-Hom, 2004). Other terms in English and Chinese are used interchangeably to describe this population. In Taiwan, these minors are referred to as '*hsiao liu hsue sheng*' [little overseas students]. Other descriptors such as 'air-dropped children' have been coined due to the lack of perceived parental care while attending school abroad, as well as 'parental dumping', 'child dumping' and/or 'unaccompanied minors' (Kim, 1998; Leung, 1998; Lin, 1998; Tsong & Liu, 2009).

Research on the parents sending their unaccompanied children abroad (i.e., to the US) found that their concern with education was the single most important reason and the main 'push' factor; traditional Asian beliefs have been known to emphasise education as the *key* for social mobility, success, and distinction (Kim, 1998; Zhou, 1998). In many Asian countries, tertiary education is a much desired but out-of-reach goal for high school graduates, due to rigorous unified national examinations (Zhou, 1998). According to Rowe (2006), parachuting children is a way to provide them with an education that promotes more critical/creative thinking, and prepares them for entrance into Western universities without having to emigrate from the country of origin themselves. They hope that their children will return 'home' after being educated abroad and having gained advantages in the global job market for being able to speak fluent English compared with those who were educated in the homeland.

(6) Satellite Kid

A similar migration phenomenon to the parachute kids discussed above is the 'astronaut family'. This refers to families whose head of household—usually the father—is living and working in the country of origin to pursue economic advantages, while the remaining family members settle in a host country. The absent parent is termed the 'astronaut', which is a derivative of the Chinese word '*taikongren*' meaning 'a person who spends time in space' (Skeldon, 1994) and the children are termed 'satellite children' or 'satellite kids' (Bauder, Waters, & Teo, 2001, pp. 102-103). The Chinese communities in Vancouver and Toronto have grown with astonishing speed over the past decade and much of the growth of satellite kids—between the ages of 13-22 years—has originated from Cantonese-speaking immigrants from Hong Kong, while a second and smaller group of Mandarin-speaking immigrants originate from Taiwan.

One or both parents spend much of their time in Hong Kong or Taiwan, leaving their adolescent satellite children to complete their education abroad, typically Canada (Tsang, Irving, Alaggia, Chau, & Benjamin, 2003). Irrespective of their origin, most of these immigrants quickly discover that Canadian employment and labour policies make it almost impossible for them to earn the same high incomes that they had done in their home country; families that entered Canada under the 'economic' category with business or independent immigrants as the principal applicant. Shortly after migration, however, the parents will return to the country of origin to continue to pursue business/professional careers, leaving their children behind. Satellite kids are the result of a significant amount of trans-Pacific mobility practised by contemporary Asian immigrants to Canada, whereby the unit of the family sustains transnational linkages with both 'home' and 'host' countries.

The circumstances of these children will vary as some reside with 'homestay families', but many live without adult supervision. Crucial for this discussion is the fact that such satellite kids are in Canada primarily to pursue educational opportunities and that their parents are unwilling/hesitant to relinquish economic ties with Hong Kong or Taiwan. Individuals studying astronaut families have found that *no* other type of family is similar to this 'astronaut' arrangement (Bauder, et al., 2001, pp. 102-103). Yet, despite the rise in the number of such families, little systematic knowledge is available about this household form, and especially about the consequences for adolescents' social and educational adjustment.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

From the available literature surveyed throughout the research period, it was difficult to isolate specific material on 'transnational' students from the tangentially-related literature. However, there appears to be a growing interest among those involved in international education to improve the understanding of transnational youth in order to aid parents, teachers and others interested in their nurture. Impending research could tap into what transnational students have to offer as active agents in their 'own' education. When stakeholders ignore the presence and participation of children in processes of migration, they obscure a central axis of the family (Velliaris, 2010). Children actively shape the nature of their families' journeys, as well as their experiences, and in shaping that journey they help to shape their own trajector(ies). It is important that their perspective is studied and better understood, thereby acting as a catalyst for continued research in this field.

SUMMARY

Research into today's international families has not yet attracted the sustained and organised attention of a large group of scholars, hence, the picture that emerges is at times fragmentary and contradictory, and has contributed to the preference for using 'metaphors' to help exemplify the

social and educational development of the youth within these families. Transnational students are raised in cross cultural and highly mobile environments, who at a young age, learn to become adaptable and independent. When a 'new' metaphor is introduced to draw attention where little attention has previously been drawn, the associated metaphor will imply coherence to certain characteristics when there is actually a 'range' of lived experiences for such transnational students. Thus, a lack of comparative research has resulted in the tendency to 'generalise' across groups. More research that focuses, therefore, on the differences *among*, as well as *within*, such transnational youth is warranted as globally, this population continues to multiply.

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