

Where is home?

How to be global and ensure you have roots too...

By Lena Lauridsen, itim international, author of "Verden Kalder – inspiration til en global hverdag"

I remember vividly my daughter screaming at me before moving to Denmark from Slovakia: "Why do we have to move just because Dad got a new job. My friends are here. Denmark is not my home." It was her second international move, but she was just five at the time and we could manage the situation. I can only imagine what it would have been like had she been a teenager.

For adult Scandinavians living in Spain, Spain is home and Scandinavia is... well, home as well, but just not where you live. Scandinavia is where your roots are and you cherish those roots in various ways, such as celebrating birthdays and special occasions in a Scandinavian way; going to the Scandinavian clubs where you speak your native language and indulging in other well-known traditions. But what about your children? Children, who speak, learn, play and express themselves more in Spanish or English than in their Scandinavian mother tongue? Children that are born in Spain and have little living experience in their parents' home country? They play not only with Carl or Anne from the Scandinavian circle of friends but also with Javier, Helmut, James and Ahmed. How do they define their roots?

I began this article with a story of my own, but let me share with you a different story to give a broader perspective. A family had been living in Brazil for many years and when the 17 year-old daughter heard that her parents

planning to leave Brazil and go home, she eloped with her Brazilian boyfriend. The story had a sad ending, because she did indeed stay, but the marriage failed. She has now returned to her parents' home country with two small children. She is not happy there, nor can she be happy in Brazil.

A gift with a price tag Scandinavian children living in Spain and experiencing the Spanish culture and lifestyle firsthand are being given a wonderful opportunity to learn several languages and develop a global mindset at an early age. They naturally and unconsciously develop cultural competences as they get different perspectives on what "normal" is and it is a profound introduction to our diverse world: it can be a gift to them.

With this gift follows a responsibility for parents to provide their children with a solid cultural anchor, which enables them to develop as human beings with multiple facets to their identity, depending on which language is spoken and what culture is dominant around them.

More and more people acknowledge that in order to become truly multi-cultural in a global world, each one of us needs to be aware of our (possibly various) roots. It is difficult for Scandinavian children in Spain to relate to their Danish, Finnish, Norwegian or Swedish identity if they do not know their parents' cultural values, norms or mother tongue. By passing these on, parents help their children to gain a

broader perspective on the world. They also minimize the risk of their children feeling rootless later in life, and thus being incapable of immersing themselves across various cultures. We all need to have a sense of who we are and where we come from. Otherwise it can be difficult to connect with others.

Growing up in various "worlds" A common term used to describe children who grow up in various cultures is Third Culture Kids (TCK). A TCK is a child that grows up with elements of multiple cultures by living in many countries or in a home where parents have different cultural backgrounds to one another. "Third culture" refers to the culture that children will tend to develop as they grow up and try to make sense of the world around them by juggling the culture of their parents and the one of the world around them (for example, the country they are currently living in). It is often a mixture of the cultural values and norms that they have experienced and which have helped them navigate through their developmental years. Having this background can be a gift, as pointed out earlier, but with a price tag, and it means parents have a good deal of responsibility to ensure that later in life their adult TCKs do not feel rootless or never completely at home anywhere.

Some sort of a solid anchor in the soil of their native country can help this process. However, this can be difficult as it is perhaps not first on the list to secure a cultural connection to one's home nation while integrating oneself

in a different country and different school system. Experiences show that many adult TCKs describe a bone-aching loneliness of not belonging when they were younger and it has resulted in the inability to connect. Certainly there are also TCKs with a strong connection to their roots and they describe a freedom to belong anywhere they want with whomever they choose.

A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in a relationship to others of similar background.

TCK Definition from the book: Third Culture Kids by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken

One common finding in research about TCKs is that they often get a visceral reaction to anything that is "too" absolute. Relativity becomes something that TCKs deal with far more than an average culture kid and it is both a strength and a curse. A strength in the sense that you can be far more open to various things thanks to the fact that from a young age you learned that one adult's absolute norm/value got you in trouble with another adult. And a curse in that you have a hard time being decisive as a result. With that being said some TCKs go to the other extreme, and become very decisive not wanting to hear other points of view as they cannot, or do not want to, handle the complexity this manifests.

The gift of living abroad as a child, therefore, comes with a price tag and for parents a responsibility to help their children understand what the conflicting norms are and make sense of this. This can be difficult as the parents are most likely trying to make sense of it themselves, but it can be a real burden on kids if there is not support on this front.

Identity and language is connected Giving children a mother tongue can be an important tool for parents in helping create this sense of cultural identity or roots to a "home culture". The ability to speak several lan-

guages is a fantastic gift, and the majority of research shows that children can easily learn and speak several languages at the same time. So, in addition to the English or Spanish that is most likely the school language of children living in Spain, there is no need to worry about overburdening your children, as they will easily learn their parents' mother tongue as well in all its nuances.

Many children experience that what they do or say in one language might feel awkward or stiff in a different language, and this can be quite confusing as well. Not all words and concepts can be translated directly, perhaps they do not even exist in the other language and you have to rephrase the entire sentence. It is most likely that the language spoken at school will override others, as children will have more pressure to express themselves correctly in school than for example at home. Therefore, the onus is on the parents to find ways to teach their children their mother tongue and for them to speak it in a profound and correct manner with family, friends and perhaps later on during studies and work back "home" in Scandinavia.

Sometimes we are able to do this ourselves as parents. However, we have to be aware that languages evolve, and whilst we are not there, our native language is developing back home; as a result the language we speak will become old-fashioned. And it is this "older" language that we pass on. So, another option you have is to enroll your children in language courses locally or in a long distance learning program where they connect with other Danish, Finnish, Norwegian or Swedish children around the globe. It can be tempting to think that you do not need to focus on language as you only plan to stay out for a few years. However, research show that many families actually stay out for longer than they expected, so it can be "dangerous" not to do something active in regard to mother tongue lessons, which also pass on so much more than just language. The lessons also help provide the cultural anchor as they give an introduction to the culture, which otherwise can be difficult to pass on.

A cultural footprint Knowledge of cultural norms, values, everyday life and how children or

teenagers interact among each other is important. A nice example is attitude towards time. If children agree to play after lunch, when is that exactly? And how long time does lunch take? A Scandinavian child would likely be ready to play around 13.00, but for a Spanish child it will more like be around 15.00. If a child lacks the cultural insights it can still feel alienation even with a perfect mastering of the mother tongue.

With today's technology, the effort to bring a Scandinavian influence into the everyday life in Spain is small and you can pass on your Scandinavian heritage by introducing movies, books, songs or television. For teenagers social media can play a substantial role, and this works for younger children as well, as they can play online games with chat functions with their cousins or friends in your home country. This develops a reference to the home country as well as it keep you updated.

When we pass on our native culture, we as parents help our children not only to gain a broader perspective on the world but also a deeper capacity to deal with the complexities of life as they have a stronger sense of self and their own roots.

Recommended reading:

Third Culture Kids by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken
Verden Kalder – inspiration til en global hverdag, by Line Mørkbak and Lena Lauridsen

For information about long distance schooling:

Denmark:

Danes worldwide:

www.danes.dk

Finland:

Finland Society:

<http://www.suomi-seura.fi>

Norway:

Nordmanns Forbundet:

www.norseman.no

Sverige:

Svenskar i Värden:

<http://www.sviv.se/>