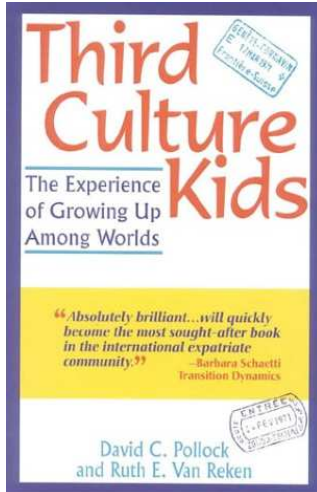


Third Culture Kids

”The experience of growing up among worlds”



by David C. Pollock & Ruth E. Van Reken

Reviewed by Sarah Maria Könes

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When I first read this book I had a lot of really eye opening moments. All of a sudden those things that made me feel my whole childhood “I am not normal” were making sense. This is a book I highly recommend to any older TCK (third culture kid), parents of TCK and even the so-called ATCK (adult third culture kid). And of course for anybody who is living or cooperating with them.

So what is it all about?! -Let me first give you a short explanation what is standing behind the expression TCK. Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are children “who have spent a significant period of time in one or more culture(s) other than his or her own, thus integrating elements of those cultures and their own birth culture, into a third culture” There is a clear difference between children that go abroad for a while (e.g. during a school exchange program) and those that are “forced to” in the early childhood as it was “normal” for the family to go abroad.

Ruth E. Van Reken, one of the authors, is an ATCK herself (mother and grandmother of TCKs), David C. Pollock the other author spent most of his working life researching and working with TCKs (he is as well founder of Global Nomads International). This huge amount of own experiences is displayed very well in the book and you can feel by reading the book the high practical impact and that’s what makes this book so helpful and well written.

The book is basically, besides the in total 18 chapters, split into two sections. The first section is about the profile of TCK's, who and how they are, understanding their world and the slightly different concept of life, compared to their supposed-to-be-peer group "at home". The second section focuses on maximizing the benefits of this kind of childhood. Both parts are all the time supported by real life examples, interviews and stories from TCKs and ATCKs. This way one gets for each of the chapters a theoretical background and real life examples (written in a language one can really imagine those TCKs would be telling it to you directly).

From the book is easy to understand that there is not the one and only TCK-Profile or a pattern that each of them follows. There are always two sides of the medal. If a child is forced to find every couple of years new friends the result might be that this is extremely easy after a while (getting used to) or the child is not even trying anymore, as the next leaving is expected already and it is not worth to try to find friends for such a "short" while. Never the less, it is proven that TCKs around the world, and it doesn't matter where they grew up, have many things in common and often the strong feeling of being one peer group. Around the world even as adults they usually find each other. It is a special way of seeing and perceiving the world and the frequent need to find others sharing this.

The authors distinguish those 5 main stages of transition experience (happening each time a move takes place):

- 1) Involvement (everything seems to be "normal" so far)
- 2) Leaving (things are changing and it is sometimes hard to say how exactly)
- 3) Transition (the chaos started! Everything seems to be new)
- 4) Entering (the readiness to really settle in started)
- 5) Re-involvement (here is the light at the end of the tunnel, starting to feel at ease)

The duration of each of these stages depends a lot on the individual personality and of course on the experience with moving one had before. The 4th move in 8 years will have a different impact than the first one. Those differences and aspects are described and explained in the book very clear and understandable.

I would like to further more share some of the insights that I consider as being key ones:

- "Whatever the rules are in any TCK's given subculture – be they matters of correct dress, correct faith, or correct political views– TCKs know that to be an accepted member of that group, they must conform to those standards"

- "The TCKs awareness that there can be more than one way to look at the same things start early in life"

¹ Page 45

² Page 79

- “Many TCKs learn to value relationships above convenience³”

- “Unfortunately, arrogance isn’t an uncommon word when people describe TCKs or ATCKs. It seems the very awareness which helps TCKs view a situation from multiple perspectives can also make TCKs impatient or arrogant with others who only see it from their own perspective⁴”

Among those statements mentioned above the book is full of explanations for behavioural patterns and advises how to handle specific situations. Especially the second section can be used like a guideline for parents of TCKs, mentioning handy tools and ways to cope with the challenges of a family life abroad.

Sarah Maria Könes

³ Page 87

⁴ page 103