Cross Cultural Conundrum – Supporting students who live between worlds.

"Who am I? Why does the color of my skin matter suddenly?"

"Why do I identify one way, but perceived as another...why does that matter?"

"Where do I belong? Where is home?"

David Pollock (2009) defines this growing phenomenon on our campuses as a "neither/nor world" and presents the following concept of Third Culture Kids or TCKs (Useem, 1993; Langford, 1998; Pollock and Van Reken, 2001/2009; Fail et al., 2004; Zilber, 2005) describing them as person(s) who have spent a significant part of their developmental years in a passport culture outside their home (or host) and move back and forth between the two. When placed in a third culture (like the United States), these TCKs or Adult TCKs (ATCKs) "frequently build relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any." (p. 13). This phenomenon is similar to Kramsch's (1993) concept of 'third place identities', which portrays a more positive view of the international student experience. He proposes that students may feel that their values and practices do not conform to their home culture but find more comfort in occupying a 'third place', which lies between the cultural practices of the home culture, and the 'abroad' culture in which they find themselves. In such a *place*, the individuals can develop self-affirming identities unencumbered by the ties and group memberships of nationality, ethnicity, etc. (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008).

Simply put, viewing students from abroad as international students coming from one culture into another is an outdated view of culture as well as identity development, both very distinct terms and processes. This oral paper presentation

examines existing literature in international student identity development through

this third culture lens and makes recommendations for research and practice.

[Word count: 291]

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