

A holistic framework for recognising cross-cultural student diversity

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Students do not develop in isolation. Their potential for educational success can be influenced by three main interacting systems or triadic partnerships: (a) the *family*; (b) the *school*; and (c) the wider *residential* community. For students primarily raised in a monocultural setting, the knowledge they develop in one of the three systems may be applied in other areas of their lives. However, for cross-cultural students, their experiences may be applied in a restricted range of settings and be of limited use in their schooling for example. This paper introduces an original adaptation of a conceptual framework based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *Ecological Systems Theory* in which the various contexts of students' lives—family, school and community—need to be seen holistically and as interacting influences on their development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) approach was extended by Epstein (1987) who described the possible partnerships among these three contexts in terms of *Overlapping Spheres of Influence*. Based on these two models, this research recognised 14 cross-cultural scenarios designed to take account of the experiences of cross-cultural students who find themselves negotiating unfamiliar cultural settings, such as at school and/or in society. The proposed framework—expressed in *both* tabular or diagrammatic form—was validated by a large study of cross-cultural students in Tokyo, Japan. The context of Tokyo was chosen as its population remains relatively homogeneous in comparison to the multicultural diversity of many other capital cities. The *four* spheres of cultural influence on the developmental ecology of these students were identified and specified as mother's cultural background (M), father's cultural background (F), school cultural background (S), and all sited within the Japanese residential country culture (R). In-depth investigation of the dynamic three-way relationships *among* family, school and community—beyond a traditional one-dimensional assessment—can improve teachers' understanding of cross-cultural students and subsequently enhance the student learning experience.

Key Words

Bronfenbrenner, Epstein, cross-cultural, family-school-community partnerships