

Mixed metaphors: Descriptive representations for transnational students

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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.

Key Words

metaphors, transnational children, international families