

Chapter 18

Navigating Co-Presence: Faculty Children and Identity Construction in International Schools

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the lived experiences of children whose parents were members of the teaching faculty in international schools. Unlike traditional school systems, international schools provide a unique environment where the roles of parents and students are interestingly intertwined, offering this as a distinct job perk. Within this complex setting, children uniquely navigate peer expectations, cultural dynamics, and faculty perceptions, thus shaping their social identities. The study involved former “faculty kids” who participated in online semi-structured interviews to reflect on their past school experiences. The interviews revealed key themes aligned with the principles of social identity theory, shedding light on the dynamics of social identity formation in this specific group of students. This research contributes to our understanding of the social dynamics within international schools and provides insights for educators, school leaders, school counsellors, and parents in supporting the well-being and development of faculty children.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the unique lifeworld of children whose parents work as faculty members in international schools. The co-presence of parents and children in the same school environment presents intriguing dynamics that warrant further exploration. The village schoolhouse is a classic vintage example of this situation, with parents serving as teachers and facing the challenges of parenting their own child while also teaching, assessing, and disciplining them. This scenario created conflicts for the parents, but it was the child who often bore the brunt of this co-presence, as it could significantly influence peer

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or teacher relationships. As participant 1 openly shared in relation to teachers, *“I always felt that I was being watched or perceived differently”* or amongst classmates, as Participant 5 remembered,

I think there was always that deep rooted suspicion that I would snitch grass on them, you know. I remember happening in class like multiple times, you know, somebody would do something and then immediately everybody would look at me and I'd be like, I'm just sitting here, man. And then, you know, they'll eventually get in trouble and I'd be like...It wasn't me.

In the past, particularly in rural villages, the options for schooling were limited, since parents had no choice but to educate their children in the same school where they themselves were teaching. However, today, similar co-presence situations exist in numerous international schools worldwide. It is not uncommon for international school packages to offer tuition benefits to the children of faculty members as a perk. From a financial standpoint, it makes sense for teachers to enrol their children in these schools, as tuition fees can often exceed \$25,000 USD per year (International Schools Database, 2022). The added bonus of being able to see and interact with their child on a daily basis is seen as a positive aspect (Haliçioğlu, 2015; Hardman, 2004; ISC Research, 2023; Search Associates, 2023; Teacher-Horizons, 2023; Tyvand, 2017). In other cases, there are simply no other viable options for English language learners in a country where the main language of instruction is different from the language spoken within the family. However, these seemingly straightforward decisions carry long-term consequences for the child, who becomes an unwilling participant in their parents' choice to take on sometimes lucrative contracts in exotic countries and insert them into asymmetrical cultural environments. Participant 5 reflects on the income disparity that was evident in his school environment being a faculty child, *“Myself and a couple of my friends who were also faculty kids, were basically the poorest kids in the school”* (Participant 5).

The study explores the phenomenon of children of faculty members attending the same international school where their parents work. In this regard, the concept of co-presence is introduced to define the simultaneous existence of the parent and the child in the same school environment, where the roles are teacher and student. While the role of parent remains constant, the co-presence is not limited to environments where the parents teach their own child or work within the same school section. The co-presence scenario occurs while the parent(s) works in the same school as the child and is defined as faculty. From the parents' perspective, there tends to be belief that this provides their children with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to receive an education alongside influential individuals, access high-quality education, and enjoy increased safety due to their proximity. However, the lived experiences of the children may differ significantly from these parental perceptions as outlined by Participant 5 in the quote above.

The co-presence of parents and children in international schools raises unique challenges. Classmates may perceive the child of a faculty member differently, potentially leading to feelings of favouritism or unfair treatment. Participant 1 vividly expressed this challenge, stating, *‘I couldn't do anything without them (their parents) knowing’*, and further revealing, *‘For the teachers, definitely they thought of me as someone that... almost like their kid in school.’* In this chapter, the author delves into this intriguing aspect of the lifeworld within international schools by conducting interviews with children of international school educators who have since graduated from these institutions. To explore the experiences of children of faculty members in international schools, this research draws upon Social Identity Theory, a seminal framework developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner and builds on the work of Ettie Zilber, who first introduced this group to the world of research. By applying Social Identity Theory to the context of faculty children, the study aims to unravel the complexities of their social identity formation in

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