

*Teaching MKs Is Real Missionary Service*  
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**Originally published in *Mission Today Magazine* '96**

*The top ten reasons...*

After months of wrestling in prayer, John finally embraces God's call to missionary service as a teacher in an overseas school for missionary kids (MKs). Bursting with enthusiasm, John excitedly shares the news at his church's next prayer meeting, but the response both shocks and discourages him.

George, his Sunday school teacher, tells him teaching missionary kids doesn't qualify as missions work because most MKs are already saved. Real missions work is preaching the gospel to the lost, George says.

Wilma, a local seminary professor, tells John to consider whether he's being a good steward of the Lord's resources. She believes he'll be wasting his gifts by teaching MKs. He'd have a greater influence on missions if he'd teach at the seminary level.

Last to counsel John is Steve, his Pastor, mentor and close friend. Steve congratulates John for being sensitive to God's call then he challenges John to consider teaching nationals rather than MKs. That would be more biblical, he says.

As John walks to his car after the prayer meeting, he feels a bit foolish for being so misguided in his missionary understanding. *I guess I was wrong about God's call*, he muses. *The folks here at First Community have been Christians longer than I and know more about missions. I guess I should forget about teaching MKs and think about teaching in a seminary where I can really do some good.*

Before you accuse me of journalistic exaggeration, I need to tell you that those who consider teaching overseas often face such a scenario. I served as a teacher in three West African mission schools, and I've been on the receiving end of similarly well-meant but erroneous comments from people I loved and respected.

With this in mind, and with all due regard for David Letterman, here are my top 10 reasons why teaching in an overseas mission school really *is* missions work:

***#10: MKs Need Christ, too***

MKs have the same spiritual needs as other kids. Just because they have missionary parents doesn't mean they know the Lord in a personal way yet. And even those who already know Christ still need mentoring to continue growing spiritually.

### ***#9: All Students Aren't MKs***

The student body in most mission schools is both culturally and religiously diverse. Because the schools generally offer high-quality education, many national and expatriate non-Christian families are eager to enroll their children, regardless of the Christian teaching and atmosphere.

As a result, teachers not only instruct their students in the "three R's" but can also model and present the gospel to unsaved children.

When I taught in Liberia, for example, my 7th grade class was made up of 18 kids from 14 countries and four religions. This multicultural, multi-religious situation gave me the opportunity to lead some non-Christian students to Christ!

### ***#8: You May Reach Parents***

Non-Christian parents with children in mission schools are exposed to the gospel. They may hear about Christ at sporting events, dramas, science fairs, PTA meetings and parent-teacher conferences. They also can see Christianity lived out by students, faculty and other parents.

One example of successful outreach is Carachipampa in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The school partnered with Luis Palau by hosting an evangelistic luncheon where he shared the gospel with 250 Bolivian parents and community members. School staff are following up decisions made by those who came, including seven who indicated a desire to accept Christ.

### ***#7: Service Can Start Young***

Since they've grown up in the host culture, MKs know the language and needs of the nationals. They recognize culturally appropriate ways to minister. Many will seize opportunities to minister in cooperation with their parents and their schools.

At the International Christian Academy in Cote d'Ivoire where I taught, several students voluntarily learned Evangelism Explosion in French so they could evangelize their community. On Sunday afternoons, teams of students traveled with faculty members to minister in nearby villages. They assisted in preaching, translating, low-level medical work, drama, child care and repair work.

### ***#6: Today's MK Could Be Tomorrow's Missionary***

According to a recent study of adult MKs, 15 to 20 percent return to the field as missionaries. That means those of us who teach them have the privilege of training part of the next generation of missionaries!

### ***#5: See Beyond a Classroom***

Most mission schools strongly encourage their teachers to participate in part-time ministry with nationals or non-Christian expatriates. When I taught in Liberia, I spent two afternoons a week teaching English to Annie, a local Liberian woman. Since Scripture hadn't yet been translated into her tribal language, Annie needed to learn English to read the Bible and communicate with English-speaking Liberian Christians.

Later, I taught in Niger. The administrators there encouraged teachers to get involved with the international community. Many of us did through book clubs, craft shows or exercising at the American Recreation Center.

### ***#4: Teachers Can Pray***

MK teachers learn firsthand how to pray for students, missionary colleagues and national brothers and sisters. They engage in spiritual battle through personal and corporate intercession. Often, they enjoy the privilege of seeing God's answers.

At one school where I taught, faculty members and students began to pray for revival. In the ensuing eight months, spiritual warfare increased dramatically until the Lord brought spiritual renewal. God honored our prayers and changed students' lives as well as our own.

### ***#3: Families Stay***

According to a recent attrition study of six mission organizations, the top reason for loss of active missionaries is "family needs, including education of MKs." This factor accounts for 20 percent of overall missionary loss!

One reason is the lack of missionary teachers. In one mission agency, 53 of approximately 150 teacher and dorm parent positions remained unfilled last year. More than 90 positions are still empty.

Consider how a lack of teachers cripples other ministries. Parents must invest their time and energy in schooling their children rather than working with nationals, as they were commissioned to do. Ministry teams lose members. Parents with several school-age children may burn out just keeping track of who's learning what and whether it's up to U.S. equivalency standards. Some missionaries leave the field entirely.

Mission organizations face critical decisions when their schools are understaffed. Should they combine grades and stretch one teacher further? Do they reassign a missionary from another ministry to cover the position? Do they temporarily close the class, grade or even the school? Those willing to teach in an MK school help alleviate these crises.

## ***#2: This is Spiritual Warfare***

Satan frequently targets missionaries' kids in order to distract their parents and disable their ministry. What better way to hinder the spread of the gospel than to sidetrack or remove families from the field by worrying them about their children's welfare? By their very presence, MK teachers serve as a vital line of defense against the enemy's tactics.

At one school where I taught, spiritual defense became dramatic when we realized some of our teenage students were struggling with emotional and spiritual problems. We offered individual counseling and prayer times and developed a seminar addressing the specific problems. During this time, we contacted the students' parents so they could visit them, encourage them and be involved in the staff's attempt to protect and nurture their families.

Finally, the number one reason why MK education is real missionary service is...

## ***#1: Teaching Is Discipling***

MK teaching is far more than just a job. As a Christian teacher, you serve as your students' primary discipler!

You become their big brother or sister, role model, counselor, coach, Bible study leader or Sunday School teacher. You become their chaperone on dates, their chauffeur, their friend. You develop deep and lasting relationships with your students as well as their parents, your colleagues, and your national neighbors.

You soon realize that your greatest teaching occurs not when you're standing in front of the chalkboard, but when you touch your students' lives. Teaching MKs means being transparent so they see God at work in your life. It means praying and crying with a teenager who shows up at your house to tell you her boyfriend just broke up with her. It's laughing with middle school boys when they play a harmless practical joke-- on you. It means twirling the jump rope for little girls at recess and helping friends make up after an argument.

More than anything else, teaching MKs means being Christ to your students. Any takers?

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**Dedria Davis-Tidwell and her husband, Mark Tidwell, now serve MKs and their families by providing a transition home for young adult MKs re-entering the U.S.**

**Check out their ministry at [www.mkstay.org](http://www.mkstay.org). Email: [info@mkstay.org](mailto:info@mkstay.org)**

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