Please cite this publication as follows:

Christie, S. and Szorenyi, A. (2015) Theorizing the relationship between UK schools and migrant parents of Eastern European origin: the parents' perspective. The International Journal about Parents in Education, 9 (1). pp. 145-156. ISSN 1973-3518.

Link to official URL (if available):

http://www.ernape.net/ejournal/index.php/IJPE/article/view/316/254

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Theorizing the Relationship between UK Schools and Immigrant Parents of Eastern and Central European Origin: the Parents' Perspective

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Schools may be particularly challenged in the building of relationships with immigrant families because of a potentially heightened mutual lack of knowledge or understanding about the other party's cultural norms (e.g. Crozier & Davis, 2007). In the context of increased immigration from Eastern and Central European states, this study seeks to initiate the development of model of multi-cultural family-school interaction drawing on existing frameworks drawn from the fields of education, psychology and sociology. With the intention of establishing the nature of migrant parents' constructions of their relationships with their children's schools, we carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 parents of school age children who had migrated to the UK from Eastern and Central Europe within the past 10 years. The key themes from the interviews indicated that the parents' expectations of their children's schooling appear to clash with those of the UK school system and that this is amplified by perceptions of poor communication, inadequate school-parent cooperation & marginalisation. Through the use of existing theoretical frameworks it was established that there is potential for improved practice though development of a model though this must take account of the full contextual complexity of the relationships.

Keywords: multi-cultural; immigrant; migrant; European; parents; theory; model; qualitative

Introduction

Several decades of research have culminated in a general consensus that a strong relationship between schools and the parents of the children that attend the school is associated with benefits to all parties (e.g. Henderson, 1987; Chavkin, 1993; Epstein, 1989, 1991). For this reason, it is vital that research attention is directed at ensuring that the opportunities for good quality relationships under these circumstances exist inclusively across all diversities of both parents and schools. This study represents an initial phase in exploring the nature of a particular but expanding niche within these diversities: the relationship between schools in the United Kingdom (UK) and parents who have recently migrated to the UK from Eastern European states. It is an exploration of the parents' construction of their relationship with their children's school which will ultimately contribute to the development of a model which characterises the relationship and can be used to improve practice.

Theories of Parent-School Relationships

The multi-dimensional complexity of influence on and around the learning child in which family, school and society interact in multiple ways that may be beneficial to the child is generally well-recognised (e.g. Epstein, 1996, 2001; Fantuzzo et al 2000). Epstein's (1989, 1996) theory of parental involvement is one of the broader and most widely cited theories and has formed the basis for many initiatives to improve parent-school relationships, particularly in the United States. It characterizes successful partnerships as

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those where school, home and community collaborate on a number of different levels to support the children's learning. The model indicates that behaviours, roles, and actions that exist and occur as a result of these interactions can be organised into 6 types of parental involvement:

- Parenting (e.g. assisting families with parenting and child-rearing skills).
- Communicating.
- Volunteering (e.g. involving families as volunteers and audiences at the school)
- Learning at home (e.g. involving families with their children in learning activities at home).
- Decision making (e.g. involving families as participants in school decisions).
- Collaborating with the community

In the context of home school-relationships, the importance of ensuring that they are functioning optimally is heightened when there is a cultural difference between the families and the culture within which the school system is operating and particularly if there is a language difference (Delgado-Gaitán, 2006). Multicultural societies as a result of migration of populations are not new phenomena. However, technological advances and enhanced globalisation over the past 20 to 30 years have resulted in greater opportunities for movement of populations. In Europe, opportunities for migration have been further advanced by policy changes which have allowed citizens of states belonging to the European Economic Area (EEA) are granted permission to move, live and work freely across the borders of EEA members. This, together with advances in technology and enhanced globalisation, has transformed the pattern and volume of mobility of populations within Europe. In the 20 years from 1993 and 2013 the proportion of foreign citizens in the UK has almost doubled from 4% to 7.9% (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva, 2014) and the greatest proportional increase within this figure is the incoming citizens from the European Economic Area. In 2011, 33% of immigrants in the UK were from EEA states (Dustmann and Frattini 2014) and the latest statistics show that classrooms are recording ethnic minority proportions of between 23 and 79% depending on the area of the country (Government of the United Kingdom).

Despite these sizeable proportion, school practice is poorly supported by evidence since the majority of research in parent-school relationships has focussed on majority groups (Crozier, 2001) and programmes are commonly based on white, middle-class values (O'Brien, 2004), both thus side-stepping the special cultural challenges that immigrant family - school relationships present. In addition, the majority of both research and practice initiatives in this area have emerged from the United States and there is a dearth of research which focuses on the sizeable number of migrants moving around Europe and in particular into the UK. There have been a handful of studies which have focussed on social cohesion (including a cursory reference to education) of European migrants coming to the UK from non EU states (Ryan et al 2010) and also several studies focussing on Polish migrants and education (Sales et al, 2008; Moskal, 2014). The latter focussed on populations in Scotland and inner London and indicated that the parents were keen to be involved in their children's education but that problems of poor communication and misunderstandings were apparent in their relationships with the schools (though the school staff were apparently unaware of this). These problems were mitigated, in part, by efforts of individual schools or particular school staff who took action to help the children and parents to integrate but these were personal or local initiatives and there was no evidence of embedded systems designed to counter the challenges of multicultural school communities. Interestingly, these studies were removed from the general trend of migrant parent-school relationship knowledge which largely adopts the perspective of the schools (Kim, 2009), often leading to a conception of minority parents rather than schools or systems as deficient in respect of involvement in their children's schooling (e.g. Geenen et al, 2001; Hughes et al, 2005). This has perpetuated an attribution of barriers to successful relationships to the immigrant parents them rather than the schools. This now needs to be countered with more research which places the child and family at the centre of the way that we understand this relationship.

Whilst models such as Epstein's furnish us with what the basic facets of good practice in parent-school relationships might be, the development of a model that can operate in

practice must attempt to account, as far as possible, for the complexity of circumstances in which the relationship will operate. Epstein's model indicates that schools and parents will potentially interact as individuals, within groups and in an ecological system of communities thus indicating that psychological and sociological factors may be salient. Use of multiple theoretical lenses will allow a more holistic exploration of the nature of the relationships and should result in the development of a more robust model. In psychological terms, the meaning that an individual gives to any experience will be determined to a great extent by their biography and, in that, the culture and practices with which they are familiar. The over-arching principle of constructive alternativism that guided Kelly's personal construct theory (1955) and which has previously been applied to the study of culture (Simpson, 2004) can provide a useful framework for aiming to understand the psychology of social relationships including those between parents and schools. For Kelly, the individual is a scientist, constantly making predictions about the world that they experience, making sense of events according to psychological constructs that are personal to them and which are a product of their personality and biography. Equally, the individual will think and behave in response to their social experience in ways that reflect their personal constructs and their interpretation of their experience. If individuals find their constructions to be inadequate or unsatisfying explanations of meaning, they may revise them accordingly. Importantly, Kelly did not consider the absolute truth to be central to interpretation of personal constructs, moreover that that the meaning of the experience to the individual is key.

In respect of the sociology of the multi-cultural parent-school relationships, Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction is an obvious choice of guiding framework in. The concept of cultural capital within this theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron,1977) lends itself to the exploration of the juxtaposition of cultures in schools and has previously been used in the study of migrant children in schools (e.g. Moskal, 2014). According to Bourdieu, schools culture is a product of and therefore similar to the dominant culture in which they are situated. This status-quo is perpetuated and reinforced by the powerful positions taken in society by individuals who succeed within the school system. Importantly, Bourdieu argues that schools' recognition of a student's cultural resources is variable depending on how well these resources (accumulated as a result of their socialisation) match with the culture of the schools. Where there is a good match, students will find the school culture familiar and their inherent cultural resources will be transformed into cultural capital. However, for students who do not belong to the dominant culture (for example, those from migrant families), their educational opportunities may be limited by their unfamiliarity with the school's way of operating such as the linguistic structures, systems of organisation and models of learning, if the school is insensitive to issues of multiculture. Though Bourdieu did not explicitly tackle parent-school relations in his theory, Blackledge (2000) argues that his theory supports the notion that facilitate the exclusion parents by (consciously or unconsciously) through activities that require specific majority cultural sophistication. Of further relevance to many migrant families is the implication that being able to use 'educated language' (of the dominant culture) is considered to be key to minimising the potential for isolation which might otherwise be caused by school's policies of exclusion (Simpson, 2002). This may be of particular relevance to the migrant group in question since Markova and Black (2007) found in their large-scale study of Eastern European migrants and community cohesion in South East UK that two thirds categorised their abilities in English as 'none' or 'basic' upon arrival.

The Aims of the Research

There is clear evidence that strong family-school partnerships can bring wide-ranging benefits and also that there are particular challenges in cases where there a difference in culture exists. There has been a significant change in the pattern and volume of migration into the UK across the past two decades with a particular influx of migrants from Eastern and Central Europe. Despite this, there are indications that the complex psychological and sociological context of the interaction between these families and their children's schools is under-researched and is not systematically accounted for in practice. This study is designed as an initial phase in theorizing this

relationship with the intention that an holistic and family-centred understanding of its characteristics will enable the development of a model which can inform practice. Specifically, this study will explore the construction of the relationship with their children's school of individuals who have recently migrated from Eastern and Central Europe to the UK. The relationship between parents and schools sits in a complex world of psychology and sociology all within the context of Education and migrant identity. For this reason, the theoretical framework for this study draws on theories which pertain to all of these areas. Furthermore, the parents' construction of their lived experience is paramount and this, not the theories, should be the focus in the model development.

Method

Design

This was a small, exploratory study with a cross-sectional design. The data (transcripts of participant interviews) were analysed qualitatively using a thematic approach whereby key themes in the participants' interviews were identified and explored in terms of their relevance to each other and to the theoretical frameworks detailed in the introduction.

Participants

We recruited 10 individuals, 9 females and 1 male, who had migrated to the UK from Eastern European States within the past 10 years and whose children were studying in 5 separate UK schools. All of the parents resided in the East Kent or Medway area of the UK parents and had migrated during the previous 10 years from a range of Eastern and Central European States – 6 from Latvia, 2 from Bulgaria, 1 from Hungary and 1 from the Ukraine. The parents' descriptions of their circumstances traversed a broad range of professional statuses, level of educational attainments, and social backgrounds (both in their originating countries and in the UK).

Procedure

A minority of the study participants were engaged opportunistically from brief presentations describing the study at cultural groups organised in local Children's Centres, which the parents attended voluntarily. The remainder of the participants were recruited by referral from the initial recruits. Each parent completed an in-depth, semi-structured interview in their own homes, lasting for durations between 1 and 3 hours. The semi-structured interview schedule was developed to ensure that every aspect of Epstein's multi-factorial model of parental engagement was addressed. It also gave the participants opportunities to talk about experiences that were particularly relevant to their status of migrant in terms of cultural differences. It was hoped that the semi-structured nature of the questions and the location of the interviews in a private, familiar space would enable the participants to speak freely and to raise and/ or expand on topics that they felt were relevant to their experience.

In the case of 7 of the recruits, the interview was conducted in Russian which was either their first or second language. Three of the parents felt that their ability in English was adequate for them to be able to understand questions and give full answers in this language. The parents received a £10 shopping voucher in appreciation of their time.

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and were subsequently translated into English where required, transcribed and analysed using QSR International Nvivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. In order to ensure robustness and internal reliability of the analysis process, the data was analysed separately and then collaboratively by two researchers, one of Eastern European origin and the other British.

Results

Overall Characterisation of the Home School Relationship

Parents described a limited range of interactions with their children's school. The majority of these related to discussions about their children's initiation into the school, academic progress either in meetings that were arranged formally as part of the usual routine by the school but also in parent-initiated meetings outside of these. Many of the parents also described attempts to collaborate with the school staff in respect of home learning with variable though generally unsuccessful outcomes. Overall, the parents' constructions of these interactions were dominated by:

1. Difficulties of communication
2. Struggles to comprehend the British classroom and general educational system
3. Perceptions of marginalisation

Perceptions of Absent or Deficient Aspects of Home-School Interaction

The parents we spoke reported no involvement in their school in respect of opportunities to learn about child development, in governance, in parents' organisations, or as part of community schemes; they reported minimal involvement as parent helpers in school trips and events. Some parents indicated that they would like to become involved in parents' organisations or community schemes but felt there were barriers to this in respect of their language competence and/or perceptions of marginalisation. Many parents also reported feeling thwarted in their attempts to source information to help with their children's home learning. The key emergent themes in this respect are reported at the end of this section.

Detailed accounts of emergent themes

The following section explores the overall characterisation of the relationship in more detail:

1. Difficulties of communication

   i. Schools lack initiative in communication

A common theme that emerged in all interviews was the observation by parents that school professionals rarely took the initiative to communicate or work together with parents. As one parent described:

> *"We are only meeting on our own initiative, because we want to know at which level my son should be, or because some kind of accident happened, or because they are offering a general meeting."*

Instances where parents described schools as actively seeking contact with them were generally restricted to issues around the child's behaviour or concerning lost property. In most cases when parents described parent-school cooperation regarding the child's learning and development, it was initiated by parents. Some parents and one child who participated in her mother's interview described initiatives taken by school staff to address children's language needs or special needs within the school. These were generally well received and appreciated by parents, although

some parents were contrasting these efforts with a perceived lack of parent-school cooperation in children's learning.

> *"If I ask the teachers, for example, when I asked about the reading, we are teaching the children like this, how are you teaching them? Then they will give some advice. In general, however, the school does not get involved in the education at home. (…) Inside the school they help the children."*

As a rule, therefore, the schools' initiatives in the area of children's learning and development did not involve parents. One mother was an exception, as she recounted having received a letter from a school informing her about her son's English level and asking her to participate in her son's language development by monitoring his extra reading assignments.

   ii. Mixed responsiveness to parents' initiatives to communicate and cooperate with schools

Parents described their initiatives to communicate and cooperate with schools as receiving mixed responses. Some parents described school staff as responding to all their requests and concerns:

> *"The teachers are helpful, they are telling everything, explaining everything, asking everything. We as parents feel free, as far as I am concerned, I can ask anything."*

Other parents felt they had to be persistent in order to have their needs met.

> *"They are trying to be responsive, but you need to constantly remind them. Remind them and remind them again, then they are fine."*

The majority of parents have described school staff as friendly, but not fully responsive to their requests and concerns.

> *"They can smile and then they do not do anything, yes. They are not ours."*

Some parents felt that the school staff was ignoring their needs.

> *"We are not addressing them often, but it happens that we need something and they are as if they do not see us. Maybe they feel*

that our English is not so good, not so correct, but they know that we are foreigners, so they can just wave their hands and do nothing."

2. Struggles to comprehend the British classroom and general educational system

The parents' accounts included many anecdotes regarding their understanding of the educational systems within which their children were learning. These extended from lack of clarity about or lack of agreement with policies specific to their children's school to clashes of philosophies of learning and teaching between themselves and school staff. The latter was most often in respect of the quantity of class and homework that the children are required to do:

"I think that they could give more homework. Not like in Latvia, where the children are going to school with so many books in their backpack that they have pain in their shoulders."

"…they should be giving more assignments to our children, because they are just letting the children develop on their own. As I said before, in my daughter's class children should to be able to count up to 20, but she is only able to count up to 10. I am asking them what I should do, how should I teach her? They are just saying, "Do not worry, she will learn in time."

Many parents also raised concerns that their children's were not being nurtured:

"If you care about the child, if you see that the child wants to do mathematics, why does the teacher not engage him? He is a living product which you can mould and form…..here they are not interested. My son went to the mathematics teacher on the following day and said, "You promised to give me extra assignments." She was simply writing three exercises on an A4 paper and that is it. And all this only once. They do not want to develop the child, there is nothing like that."

Most accounts of struggles to comprehend approaches in teaching and learning were notably embedded in the contexts of difficulties of communication and sometimes perceptions of marginalisation.

3. Perceptions of marginalisation

i. Experiences of discrimination and stereotyping.

Many of the parents told that they did not experience any discrimination from school staff.

"There was no discrimination, because there are a lot of immigrants. I did not feel rejected, there were no such problems, so it is all good."

More parents, however, mentioned that they felt that school staff had lower expectations from immigrant children and parents. One mother expressed her frustration over inadequate cooperation between parents and schools in the area of home learning, concluding that the British education system *"does not expect much from working class and immigrant children and parents"*, a view echoed by another mother:

"many teachers differentiate between local children and immigrant children" as *"they expect less from the immigrant children."*

Some parents reported positive perceptions of teachers with high expectations for their children:

"My son has another teacher now, before it was a male teacher. He told us that he is very happy, that our son is doing well (…) A new teacher came and she told that he is behind with the reading, he does not understand the numbers. (…) She told, "It does not matter that your child is an immigrant. At this age he should be able to do the same things (as an English child)." (…) I told her that I am very grateful to her for telling me that, because her expectations from my child became higher. And as I said, well done to this teacher."

However, a parent who had two higher education degrees felt offended by the assumptions underlying the tone of a mandatory questionnaire aimed at immigrant

parents, the last question being, "Now that you are in the UK, what do you expect from your child's British education?"

"I told them that I expect the same as from any other education system, namely, to develop his talents and abilities. Then the lady who did the questionnaire told me that I will see, that here in the UK, if someone is willing to work hard on their education then they can be successful. I thought to myself, (m)y father has a PhD and three master's degrees (one in education), my uncle is the head teacher of a grammar school, I have teaching experience and I am currently doing my third master's degree. Why does she think that I have no clue about what education is all about?"

Another mother felt that the headmaster was making a distinction between parents *"not so much on the basis of immigration, but on the basis of who is better off or worse off financially"* or that the two circumstances were conflated:

"this year (…) for some reason the Salvation Army has brought us a gift from the school at Christmas. (…) There was food and shopping items in the gift and we were asking ourselves what it the school's opinion of our family. (…) I was very offended."

ii. Experiences of empathy

It is important to note that not all parents reported negative interactions in this respect: some also recalled experiencing empathy and understanding from school staff.

"The receptionist at the first school in our new place of residence was very patient with us when we were late picking the children up. I felt that she empathised with us, understanding what it might be like to have just moved, not to know supportive people or services and both of us working."

iii. Experiences of exclusion and inclusion.

Parents described instances when they felt excluded by school staff. All these cases appeared to have a direct or indirect effect on their children as well.

"I can only tell that they probably know who you are, first of all, that you are a foreigner. The only thing is, some teachers say hello and some teachers don't even notice you. (…) Many ignore you. Very often it happens, very often. After a while it feels like you don't even exist. My daughter comes, she is saying hello once – at first she did not say hello and we were scolding her – she does not hear. She comes closer, she is saying hello again, very loudly. Then she says hello to her."

However, parents also gave accounts of feeling included or valued by school staff members, usually in connection with extra-curricular events. One parent felt valued by the fact that her sons' school was acknowledging her sons' achievements by choosing them to participate in the school's team in a swimming competition.

" I am encouraging them to go to trainings, and the school is helping what I am doing a little bit in this way. This I consider to be positive. They do not just think that we came here because Latvia is poorer. We came here to adapt, and we are making their country stronger, we are making their schools stronger (…). And for them there is nothing bad in this, and on the trainings there are all kinds of students."

Another parent also perceived an atmosphere of inclusiveness and diversity at an after school club.

"I really like the fact that there are different age groups, both sexes, girls and boys together, and different nationalities. (…) The trainer is really good. The trainer can bring this diverse group together. I really like it."

Within the context of the issues of communication, limited understanding of systems and perceptions of marginalisation, two specific areas of interaction emerged from the parents' accounts as key areas of dissatisfaction: collaboration in learning at home and knowledge of home life. The following section expands on these:

1. Collaboration in learning at home.

Except in respect of providing general information, the parents did not construct their children's teachers as encouraging children's home learning in other ways. All four participants who have studied at higher education level have described attempts to request additional assignments for their children's home learning, with little or no success. This was interpreted in a variety of ways by parents. Two parents viewed their lack of success in involving the school in their children's home learning as a characteristic of the British education system.

> *"We were speaking about this and they told that they do not have such a system."*

> *"I do not know whether the school really can help us particularly with the homework and maybe the answer is not."*

Another mother had the opinion that the British education system did not treat working class and immigrant parents as assets in their children's education. Therefore, this parent's perception of her own value in the education system was influenced by mixed responses to her initiatives to cooperate with schools in relation to children's home learning.

> *"I made a couple of attempts to ask for extra homework for my children, but they were not very successful. (…) I did not have the impression that any of the schools that my children went to particularly valued parents' contribution to the pupils' education. It might be because the areas we were living in are working class areas with lots of immigrant parents. (…) All this talk about diversity and inclusiveness thinly masks a deeper reality that the public education system does not expect much from working class and immigrant children and parents."*

2. Schools' knowledge of parents' and children's home life

Another factor that influenced parents' perceptions of how school staff valued them was the degree of interest professionals displayed in getting to know parents and children's' home lives. However, only two parents out of ten felt that school staff knew a lot about them and their children's' home lives.

> *"They know that we are trying to help them, they even know what we are trying to do at home and how we organize the weekends and everything. Particularly in this school, because they have a specific questionnaire and they ask about, for example, what the child wants to do at home, any favourite things, games, something that the child is not happy to do (…) So I think they know everything about that child and about the family, which is, I think, quite good."*

Except for a small number of parents who did not feel confident enough to communicate with schools (and therefore school staff did not have a chance to get to know them), the rest of the parents thought that schools did not know much about them because they were not interested.

> *"I think the school does not know much about us. They know only the things that we are telling about us at some meetings, but I think there is little interest. I did not ask my son if the school has shown any interest in us. As for us, nobody really asks anything. How we are, what are we doing at home? We did not have any questions like this or any letters asking these questions. Also, nobody asked anything about how we can help the child at home. We ourselves took the initiative in this respect."*

As parents interpreted lack of knowledge as disinterest, this in turn had an effect on the perception of their own value within the parent-school relationship. One parent who said that the school does not know anything about their family as they might not be interested also felt that the school is not counting on the parents and that they do not value the parents' contribution to their children's education:

> *"they don't know anything, they don't ask anything and it seems like they do not care".*

Discussion

The parents' construction of their relationship with their children's schools were based upon a narrow range of interactions and characterised by the parents as involving uni-directional channels of communication (parent approaching school). The parents described varying levels of satisfaction with responses from school staff in these interactions, this variability seemingly dependent on the personalities of the individuals involved. Issues of poor communication, struggles to understand and work with British classroom practices and concerns about marginalisation and exclusion dominated the parents' constructions of their experiences.

Epstein's model of parent-school relationships describes six areas of home-school-community interaction which she believes schools should use as a basis for developing strong practice. Our parents' construction of incidences of interaction with their children's schools were narrow compared to Epstein's taxonomy, indicating that there is potential for systematic improvement in the way the school structures its involvement across all parents. Prior research has indicated that cultural differences present special challenges for parent-school relationship and this was certainly borne out in the accounts of our parents. It was previously found that in Epstein's taxonomy, the issue of communication is of particular importance for migrants. Our exploration concurs with this; communication difficulties as a result of language and cultural differences appear to colour the parents' constructions.

We proposed that Kelly's constructive alternativism might be a useful framework within which to understand the parents' personal response to their encounters with their children's schools. Indeed, the concept of personal constructs and Kelly's sense of individuals as 'lay-scientists' predicting events and attempting to rationalise experiences fits with the accounts of the parents in this study. Clearly the parents' personal experiences of schooling in their home countries resulted in expectations and predictions about the nature of learning and schooling and education systems. As both Moskal (2014) and Sales et al (2008) found, these constructions clashed with the lived reality of their interactions with their children's schools and these clashes appeared to engender significant misunderstandings and frustrations. The tenets of constructive alternativism suggest that where personal constructs become inadequate in lived situations, they will be replaced by alternatives which provide a better 'fit' with the situation. Initial indications from our study seem to suggest that this process is dependent on many other factors and for some, does not happen at all. Clearly the parents' constructions of the philosophy of learning and teaching were deeply embedded and not easily changed by their experiences of the UK systems, particularly in the context of perceptions of poor communication, inadequate school-parent cooperation and marginalisation. This is a potent combination which potentially results in parents who feel disempowered to participate in their children's learning. This psycho-social barrier to effective relationships is clearly an important contextual factor which requires further investigation in respect of its relevance to the development of an ultimate model of multi-cultural parent-school relations.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been previously applied to work with migrant children in schools but has a wider applicability to the relationship to migrant families operating within a school system. Our parents' constructions of their experiences certainly contained anecdotes of perceived marginalisation which would fit with a social structure which devalues the cultural attributes of families who do not belong to the majority culture. There has been some debate in the literature around Bourdieu about whether children and families from minority groups are *deficient* in cultural capital or whether they should be considered as possessing the 'wrong type' of cultural capital. There was evidence in our study that the latter might provide a better explanation since the majority of the parents described rich cultural and educationally sophisticated home lives which were apparently divorced from school activities. Bourdieu is pessimistic about the potential to change the disadvantageous nature of the educational system for those whose cultures do not correspond to the dominant cultures, since he viewed the educational system as a microcosm of the greater social system and equally as entrenched. Nevertheless, in practice, Li (2006) states that though attempts to enhance cultural capital on the part of migrants is inadequate to impact on the

situation, progress could be made if schools were to treat their cultures as funds of knowledge. Indeed, prior work by Gonzales et al (2005) and Cremin et al (2012) indicated beneficial impacts of schools reaching out to explore the learning lives of children whose cultures varied from the dominant school cultures. In our study, whilst there were reports of at least one school utilising a questionnaire system to find out about the home lives of the children, this seemed to be a local initiative and represented just a tentative step into valuing the opportunities presented by multi-cultural learning lives outside school. Regrettably, our parents' accounts construed no knowledge of school initiatives to find out about the wider learning lives of their immigrant pupils. This is clearly an area of great potential which could be feature in the development of a future model.

Finally, as Sales et al (2008) found in their study of Polish students in London, our parents reported that the much of nature of their experience of and their response to the interactions with the school were mediated by the personal efforts of individuals. It was apparent, however, that in our study, schools did not appear to have access to some of the resources that Sales and colleagues reported such as bilingual teachers, indicating that there may be variations across areas of the country in the assets that schools possess to embrace multi-cultural classrooms. Whilst it is heartening to hear accounts of school staff who are working to form strong relationships with migrant families, it is however unacceptable to be reliant on adhoc individual efforts rather than broad systems of good practice.

This study was undoubtedly small scale and exploratory, yet there are strong indications that the relationships between Eastern and Central European immigrants and their children's schools have the potential to be significantly improved. Whilst the features of mainstream conceptions of ideal parent-school relationships were not well represented in our study, Kelly's personal construct psychology and Bourdieu's notion of Cultural Capital did prove somewhat useful in beginning to understand the very complex context in which these relationships exist. If a useful model of the interaction is to be developed, further work now needs to be done to widen the scope of this initial study, particularly by extending the range of migrant families to include those from States that were not included in this study and have not been the subject of other major studies. Notably, this study did not recruit any parents who self-identified as 'Roma' (also known as Romany). Since it has been reported that children from this culture continue to underachieve across all school stages in the UK (Department of Education and Skills, 2005), this is an important omission that should also be rectified. In addition, this study offers the perspective of only one group of stakeholders in a system that involves many. In order to develop a model that can inform practice effectively and which can be widely supported, it is vital that the perspectives and resources of all stakeholders including school staff and the children are explored and incorporated

Acknowledgements

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