INTRODUCTION

Poland’s accession to the EU in May 2004 brought many new possibilities for Polish migrants to Britain and had complex implications for their strategies and aspirations. Migration from Poland following the opening up of the countries of the Eastern bloc in the 1980s-90s tended to be perceived as short term, transient and individual, much of it undocumented (Iglicka, 2001; Morokvasic 2004; Gryzmala-Kazlowska 2005; Duvell 2004). On the other hand EU membership, by opening up legal access to the labour market in Britain, allows people to come and go freely, facilitating temporary – and often multiple – stays, or ‘commuter migration’ (Morokvasic, 2004; Garapich, 2008). In the period from May 2004 to June 2010, almost 700,000 Poles registered with the Workers Registration Scheme as employees1. While Fihel el al (2006) point to the temporariness of much of this migration, others argue that EU citizenship provides new rights and may promote a sense of belonging, encouraging more permanent stay (Burrell, 2009). Thus, a substantial proportion of Polish migrants have moved onto a new phase of long term or indefinite stays, with family reunion developing as family members join men who had initially migrated alone (Eade et al, 2006; Pollard et al, 2008; Ryan et al, 2009; Lopez Rodriguez 2010). In fact, one unforeseen consequence of this new migration trend was the large numbers of Polish children arriving in British schools. According to the School Census,2 in 2010 there were at least 40,700

1 i.e. 690,850 (Source: Accession Monitoring Report, 2008, and Control of Immigration Statistics, 2010). The Worker Registration Scheme was introduced in 2004 to monitor citizens of accession ‘A8’ countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) who come into the UK labour market. A8 citizens need to register under the WRS if they wish to work for an employer in the UK for more than one month. Self-employed, family members, students and other categories are exempted. So the WRS statistics are indicative at best.

2 The School Census is conducted at local level by schools and coordinated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It recently started to collect data on languages spoken
primary and secondary schools pupils in England whose first language was known or believed to be Polish.

In this paper we explore processes of adaptation, accommodation, negotiation and identity formation. In particular, we analyse the ways in which Polish migrants construct notions of Polishness in the context of education. We draw upon data from three recent studies. The first, *Recent Polish Migrants in London: social networks, transience and settlement*, explored the importance of family and life course in migration decision-making. It involved individual interviews with 30 migrants with a range of family situations, migration history and personal characteristics; interviews with key informants with knowledge of recent Polish migration; and three focus groups (Ryan et al, 2007). This study suggested that children’s schooling may be an important factor in migration decision-making, particularly as stay is prolonged (Ryan et al, 2008; 2009). The second study, *Polish Children in London Schools: opportunities and challenges*, explored the progress of Polish pupils in London primary schools and involved 17 interviews with a range of staff involved in supporting Polish pupils and with 11 Polish parents of primary school-aged children. The main focus of this study was the achievement of children within the education system but the interviews raised some key issues concerning the nature of migration decisions (Sales et. al., 2009). The third study *Stories of Three Generations of Polish Immigrants* (2010) focused on the experiences of Polish migrants in the London borough of Enfield and was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. As part of that study three recently arrived Polish children, all of whom were in secondary education, were interviewed. In this paper we also draw upon those three interviews. The names of all interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity. Most interviews were conducted in Polish and have been subsequently transcribed in English.

and although provision of this data is not compulsory, DCSF quality checks deemed the data supplied by specific language categories sufficiently robust to produce national level reports.

3 *Recent Polish Migrants in London: networks, transience and settlement*. Grandholders: Louise Ryan, Rosemary Sales and Mary Tilki funded by the ESRC (RES-000-22-1552). Bernadetta Siara was the research fellow on the project.

4 *Polish Pupils in London Schools: opportunities and challenges*. Grant Holders: Rosemary Sales, Louise Ryan, Alessio D’Angelo (commissioned by Multiverse). The research fellow on the study was Magdalena Lopez Rodriguez. The research for paper also benefitted from our ESRC funded Follow-On activities (RES-189-25-0005).


6 In the schools study the Polish interviews were conducted by Magdalena Lopez Rodriguez, where participants were happy to be interviewed in English these were carried out by Louise Ryan. In the Enfield study the interviews with children were carried out by peer researchers trained by Louise Ryan.
In the following sections we briefly review the literature on schools as sites of socialisation and acculturation and we then explore how Polish parents and children engage with the British educational system. In particular, we focus on schools as sites of socialisation where newly arrived migrants encounter the host society in complex and varied ways. We consider how migrants negotiate their identity in the context of schools and develop relations with other ethnic groups, including English people. Finally we discuss the adaptive strategies that the parents and children use to navigate their new surroundings and make sense of their migratory experiences.

SCHOOL AS A PLACE OF SOCIALISATION AND ACCULTURATION

Schools are a key site of socialisation and acculturation for children. For immigrant children, in particular, they are often the place where they “first encounter in-depth contact with the host culture” (Adams and Kirova 2006: 2) and - as Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) have argued - “where most of a culture’s dominant discourses are exchanged”. Sometimes this is also true for immigrant parents: whilst their working and social life can be partially confined within the ethnic and linguistic boundaries of their own community networks, their children’s education requires them to encounter and engage with the host society, its culture and institutions.

The way in which parents and children approach schools and education is strongly influenced by their pre-migration experiences and by the culture of their country of origin, which can of course vary considerably. For example, in some societies it may be common to hold teachers in high esteem as authority figures that cannot be questioned or challenged, whilst in others parents may have a more assertive and questioning attitude towards education. More generally, Roer-Strier and Strier (2006), in their study on different migrant groups in Israel, observed that within some educational systems independent thinking is valued whereas in others conformity and obedience is expected. They concluded that “parental social cognition, childrearing ideologies, expectations, norms, rules and beliefs tend to preserve meaningful elements of their original cultures” (ibid., pp 104-5) and referred to a cultural lag during which migrants hold firm to their own values and traditions. Parents, as well as children, may also be accustomed to a schooling system where various practical elements can be significantly different from the host country, including the curriculum’s structure, the forms of communication between school and family, the amount and type of homework and even the classroom layout or the dress code (Ryan et al. 2010a).
All these elements can result in clashes of expectations between parents and schools, which may often be implicit and not openly discussed, leading to further misunderstandings and even tensions. Migrants may also regard the education system in the host society as inferior to that of their country of origin, often because they do not fully understand how it works (Reynolds, 2008; Ryan et al., 2010a; Adams and Shambleau, 2006). The norms of the new context, especially in relation to respect for elders, may lead them to conclude that children in the host society are all badly behaved, rude and undisciplined. In recent research with Afghani and Somali mothers in the London borough of Barnet (Ryan et al., 2010b), several mothers observed that school children in Britain are ‘cheeky’ and disrespectful. The mothers were concerned that their children would copy such behaviour and challenge parental authority.

Moreover, parents and children may experience racism and discrimination they did not anticipate or, in a multicultural country like the UK, experience ethnic and cultural diversity for the first time, often having to re-think their own identity. Thus migration requires a form of ‘cultural frame switching’ (Adams and Kirova, 2006: 4; Lafromboise et al., 1993): a process of understanding and engagement with the cultural norms of the host society. This does not mean that parents need to abandon their values and traditions altogether. However, a mutual understanding between parents and teachers, where both become aware of each other’s expectations, can ease tensions and promote a greater sense of trust and cooperation (Heckmann, 2008).

It is equally important that children do not feel torn between conflicting influences and expectations. As Adams and Kirova argue “children’s identity formation is influenced by at least two distinct, and sometimes contradicting, cultural systems: the home culture and the school culture” (2006: 8). This can put pressure on the children as they find themselves at ‘the cross roads’ between home and school (Roer-Stier and Stier, 2006). In most cases the migration experience is unexpected and confusing at best, if not shocking and frightening. These feelings will accompany the child to the classroom, where they may be exacerbated or alleviated according to the practices and strategies put in place by teachers and families. As Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) have suggested, the cultural capital that newly arrived children bring with them may not be easily translated into the new environment. On the other hand, the cultural capital that is valued within the host society may not be accessible to them in the short term (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; Erel, 2010). For some children socialisation into a new society may also mean rebelling against their parental culture and values (Ryan et al., 2010a). However, as recent research shows (Devine 2009; Holland, Reynolds
and Weller 2007), children are not mere recipients of parental culture, but can also be “key contributors to processes of capital accumulation by the family” (Devine 2009: 526). In particular, because of their learning experiences in the classroom, children often become the cultural or language brokers to interpret the host society for their parents.

Some migrants, especially transient groups, may invest more time and energy in maintaining links with their country of origin, or with ethnic-specific communities in the host society, rather than establishing new and ethnically diverse relationships. As others have noted (Adams and Shambleau, 2006), parents may view their children’s language acquisition as entirely the role and responsibility of the school, for example making little effort to encourage the host country’s language being spoken in the home. On the other hand, ‘success’ in the new society may be measured by both parents and child in terms of how well the child is doing in school, learning the new language and making new friends (Adams and Shambleau, 2006: 88). Although language proficiency is regarded in many countries as the vehicle for the integration of migrant children, a necessary part of belonging (Roer-Strier and Strier, 2006: 103), it is misleading to simply equate language acquisition with acculturation into new society (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Language is just the most evident of the many issues faced by migrant children, including: “finding new friends; dealing with loss and loneliness; adjusting to a new teacher and new school system (...); adjusting to a new cultural environment; trauma that may have occurred preceding, during and after migration; and racism or anti-immigration sentiments” (Reynolds, 2008:5).

In addition, parents and teachers reliance on children as interpreters can often lead to further misunderstandings between family and school (Ryan et. al, 2010a). It can also mean that parents feel disempowered or humiliated as their children have more information and knowledge than themselves (Roer-Strier and Strier, 2006: 109). This, together with parents’ downward mobility, challenges to traditional family roles and conflicts about plans to stay or return, may diminish the value of parents’ cultural capital (Kelly and Lusis 2006; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010) and impact on the dynamics between parents and children.

As well as understanding the expectations and prior experiences of migrant parents and children, it is also important to understand the context into which they are entering. In the next section we briefly review education policy and practice in the UK.
THE UK CONTEXT: MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

The UK is a highly, and increasingly, diverse country: the 2001 Census recorded around 8% of the population as ‘ethnic minorities’ and a recent study (Wohland et al. 2010) estimates they will rise to 20% by 2051. This is fully reflected in primary and secondary schools throughout the UK and in England in particular. A decade ago minority ethnic pupils constituted a fifth of the schools population. However, by January 2010 over 1.5 million of the 6.5 million pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools were of ‘minority ethnic’ origin: 25% of the total (School Census). In London the proportion is even higher: 66.7% in primary and 62.1% in secondary schools. The School Census also collects statistics in terms of ‘first language’, thus offering a better insight on the diversity of schools population. Overall, there are 896,230 pupils in English primary and secondary schools whose first language is known or believed to be other than English, almost 14% of the total. Polish-speaking pupils, in particular, have risen from 26,840 in 2008 to 40,700 in 2010, becoming the fourth largest language group in England, after long-established ones such as Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali.

Educationalists and policy makers in the UK have been debating how to approach such diversity since the 1960s (Reynolds 2008: 6). In 1985 the government report ‘Education for All’ promoted a model of multicultural education which should balance the support for the cultures and lifestyles of all ethnic groups and the acceptance of values shared by society as a whole. Whilst the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 - with its emphasis on an homogeneous teaching programme - was seen by some as a step backward (Gilborn 1995), the 1999 Green Paper ‘Excellence for All Children’ marked a strong commitment towards ‘inclusive schools’ and the need to develop structures and practices which allow schools “to respond more fully to the diversity of their pupil populations” (Clarke et al 1999: 157). The same year saw the introduction of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), intended to fund Local Authorities initiatives to meet the needs of ethnic minority children and those who have ‘English as an additional language’ (EAL). The grant allowed the introduction of dedicated EMA practitioners both at school and local authority level.

In recent years, various research studies have recorded both success stories and failures, highlighting the impact of different local practices, socio-economic contexts and ethnic composition on the achievement and socialisation of pupils (for an overview see Reynolds, 2008). The overall national picture, however,
is still characterised by significant differences in terms of school achievement amongst pupils of different ethnic backgrounds (DES 2005).

One of the main limits of the current multicultural policy model is its delay in adapting to and engaging with a new level and kind of diversity – what Vertovec (2007: 3) labelled ‘Super-Diversity’: a “kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced”, with a dynamic interplay of variables including ethnicity, country of origin, religious tradition, migration and legal status. Interestingly, the extent and complexity of diversity in UK schools can also affect children’s inclusion. In particular, Reynolds (2008) echoes Verma et al. (1994) in arguing that students’ inclusion may be more difficult in a largely bi-ethnic schools, where identities polarise, than in ‘super-diverse’ schools where “boundaries between groups are blurred and there are many and diverse opportunities for ‘identity matching’”. (Reynolds 2008: 19) In other words “being bi-ethnic is harder than being multi-ethnic” (ibid: 26).

Nonetheless, most of the UK education policy and practice - from monitoring of achievement to provision of dedicated support – seem to disregard this new super-diversity, still relying on the traditional 16 ethnic categories, mainly based on colonial and post-colonial migration (Sales and D’Angelo, 2008: 30). The concept of ‘Black and Asian Minority Ethnic’ (BAME) means that, for example, ‘White minority’ groups such as Poles are left out from both official statistics and policy. The focus on ethnicity also ignores migrant students as a group with specific needs. In fact, as Reynolds (2008: 5) points out “the status of a student as ‘migrant’ is largely absent from education policies”. It is partly for this reason that, unlike other western countries – the US in particular – UK migrant children exist in a ‘research void’ (Ackers and Stalford, 2004). In particular, “studies of first-generation immigrant children’s voices in relation to schooling are rare, with the exception of some research in the area of refugee children” (Devine 2009: 521).

POLISH FAMILIES IN BRITAIN

As Polish migrants have become more settled in Britain, family reunion has become more common (see Ryan, et al, 2009; Ryan and Sales, forthcoming; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010, White, 2010). But that is not to suggest one simple kind of family

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7White-British, White-Irish, Any other White background, Mixed (White and Black Caribbean), Mixed (White and Black African), Mixed (White and Asian), Any other mixed background, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Any other Asian background, Black Caribbean, Black African, Any other Black background, Chinese, Any other ethnic group.
migration strategy. In our research we have found various models of family reunion. In some cases reunion is a planned strategy from the outset although one partner, usually though not exclusively the husband, may migrate first alone to find a job and accommodation before the rest of the family follows. In other cases, the family may not have intended reunion but after years of separation it is agreed that the partner and children will follow the lead migrant. We have also found examples where both partners migrate, leaving children behind with relatives in Poland, the so-called ‘Euro-orphans’. In a few cases, as we will discuss below, family migration may be linked to marital breakdown as family members leave Poland to make a fresh start following divorce. Of course, as we have discussed elsewhere (Ryan et al, 2009), family migration does not refer only to nuclear families and may in fact involve a wide range of relatives, including sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles and even grandparents.

In previous papers we have discussed some of the challenges faced by Polish parents in accessing schools and learning to navigate the complex and diverse British educational system (see Sales, et al 2008; Ryan and Sales, forthcoming). In those discussions we focused in particular on issues relating to language and communicating with schools. In this paper we concentrate on wider issues of social interaction and socialisation, for parents and pupils, within the school environment. We begin by examining the experiences and expectations of parents and we then move on to consider the children’s point of view.

THE PARENTS’ EXPERIENCES

Expectations of schools

Most of our interviewees continually compared the British system with schools in Poland, which they regarded as better. As one father put it: “of course, it is a paradise in Poland compared to what it is here”. He was particularly worried about lack of discipline and recommended more corporeal punishment. More generally, parents perceived the British schooling system as too easy and informal, often complaining about too little home work and the fact that pupils do

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8 The ‘Euro-Orphans’ debate has received significant media attention in Poland and has many of the features of a ‘moral panic’. The term has been used very generally to refer to a wide range of different experiences including where one or both parents migrate, and where children are left for short or long periods with a grandparent. Some commentators have argued that while children may benefit from the improved economic well-being of the family, the absence of their parents may have emotional consequences which manifest themselves in lower motivation to learn, lower attendance at school and falling grades (Walczak 2008).
not take many books at home. At the same time, several parents appreciated that children in Britain enjoy more freedom.

‘Children are not too overloaded with material because they don’t learn too much [laughs] and it is all in the form of play, which I also appreciate; in Poland the level of education is much higher but children cannot have a rest’. (Anna)

‘The good thing is that children do not need to carry their books, that their backpacks, bags are not heavy, they have all the materials there (at school) (…) Yes, children feel much more free, it is all … I don’t know… maybe more relaxed, there is no stress. In Poland, we know, you have to sit at a desk with someone and you have to always learn something, everyday you have a small test, you have loads of books, different subjects and here it is not like that’. (Zuzanna)

Whilst some parents were critical of the British educational system, others were very appreciative of how schools had welcomed and supported their children. One mother also acknowledges that Polish parents may be overly demanding:

‘Polish parents and Polish mothers are often a bit oversensitive and overprotective and I think they too often go and ask for things and here it seems they(school staff) do not like it’ (Jolanta)

In fact, some parents seemed to suggest that schools were even doing too much.

‘It is very good that school want to help children of migrants [but] I think it is a responsibility of the parent. It is my duty. I do not think that they [schools] should organise additional lessons or place more resources for these children just because these children do not know English’ (Ewa).

Parents’ observations about the British educational system were not only concerned with teaching and learning but also with the ethnic composition of the schools. To a certain extent this relates to a lack of familiarity with a multicultural and multilingual education environment, so different from the Polish schools most parents were used to.

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8 Our interviews with teachers suggested that Polish parents often did not understand the work that was going on in schools to support their children. While some parents were critical of the British educational system, it was apparent that significant resources of time and support were being made available by school staff to help Polish children learn English and adjust to their new learning environment.
Diversity and Racism

Amongst the parents we interviewed there was a sense of surprise that London – and its schools – is so ethnically diverse. This led to some complex encounters around identity in schools. As one mother put it:

"you could count on your fingers all the white children who were there, it was awfully Black there ... so we did not agree and we did not accept this school ... it seemed it would not be a good school for Piotr ... girls in scarves... it was not what we were looking for... in fact it was such a shock for us" (Jolanta).

Similarly, Marta noted "I am not racist but I would not like... you know I am sometimes afraid of Black people, just like that, I had some unpleasant [experiences] in the playground". This sense of fear and shock may be explained in terms of lack of familiarity with diversity. Black people are encountered as a homogeneous group of suspicious strangers not as individuals with particular characteristics and diverse personalities. In the absence of meaningful interpersonal contact and communication, Black people may be perceived by newly arrived Poles as threatening and frightening. Within this context, Polish people may perceive themselves as being at risk of verbal or physical abuse. For example, Anna said her children were 'shocked' by the ethnic diversity of London and had been subjected to bullying from some Black children at school:

"Sometime the children are picked on by some other children and these are not really English but by the Black or, as one colloquially says, by 'ciapati' children; and I think most often stems from the racism of the parents". (Anna)

Although Anna asserted that her family is not racist, it is ironic that she then uses a derogatory term, ‘ciapati’ to describe Black children. Rather than challenging ethnic stereotyping, she is thus, perhaps inadvertently, reinforcing racist language in her own children. Thus, Black/White relations are reversed as White newly arrived migrants perceive themselves as the victims of racist abuse from the Black indigenous population. However, it is not only Black people who are considered to be racist against Poles. Anna added that English teachers were also racist against her son who had special needs: ‘I have the impression he is not entirely accepted by teachers. I don’t know the reason; if it is racism... because they cannot show it openly’. Other parents also suggested that some English teachers don’t like Polish parents and children:

‘Maybe the teachers think that we do not speak good English and they do not have good rapport with us but you can see how they speak to other parents of
English children and how they treat them and how they treat Polish children, for example the teacher can stroke a child or in general the kind of gestures which show that those children are simply better’ (Jolanta)

Thus, some mothers tend to construct Poles as victims rather than perpetrators of racism in London. English people were often described, if not as openly racist, as unfriendly towards Poles. The basis for this unfriendliness was usually explained by the Polish parents in terms of economic competition for jobs.

‘...the English ... they have never been very friendly to us ... I am absolutely convinced they regard us as second rate ... for instance they would not say hello. And they pretend they do not see you, you smile to them... you can feel it... their husbands work, ours work, we do take their jobs away from them, we are rivals for them, we have better skills’ (Marta)

On the other hand most parents agreed that overall in Britain there is a more positive approach towards diversity than in Poland.

‘It is incomparably better here than in Poland, here in all the offices whenever you enter there is ‘hello’ and ‘welcome’ in Urdu, Russian, Polish ... in Poland it would never happen because we would never agree upon such influx of migrants as it is here.’ (Anna)

Whilst some of the parents comments would be perceived as ‘racist’ in British mainstream culture, in most cases they seem mainly to indicate a lack of familiarity and difficulties in adapting to London’s ethnic diversity. Suspicion and lack of trust towards other groups may also reflect the socio-economic positioning of many recently arrived Polish migrants in London (Garapich, 2008). This may result in a sense of competition with other groups for jobs, housing and school places. For example, many of the Polish participants in our studies spoke about their children being put together with other immigrants in schools. However, it should be noted that some parents recognised this as a positive approach to overcome common language and integration issues.

‘The good thing was that there was a group of children, not only from Poland, also from African countries, those who did not know the language well or did not know the language at all as in the case of Mariola, they had a separate teacher who would take a group of children to a different room and they had classes, activities where they would learn English from scratch’ (Zuzanna)
Another mother highlighted how, also outside the school context, they would have friends of different backgrounds:

‘We have 3 friends from Pakistan, we worked with them earlier and this friendship stayed, one of them lived with us a bit, he treats our home as his second home’ (Sylwia)

However, for some parents mixing or being grouped together with other ‘non-British’ people came as a shock: for the first time they had to think about themselves as ‘migrants’, as a ‘minority’.

**Re-defining identity through migration**

As argued elsewhere (Ryan, 2010a) Polish migrants re-construct their identities post-migration. The sense of ‘becoming a migrant’, together with the upheaval, the de-skilling or loss of status, may often lead them to assert a sense of pride and self-worth:

‘I think Poles are a very intelligent nation and there are many Poles here having responsible posts, good jobs and generally the English are not very happy about it’ (Jolanta)

This sense of rivalry between Poles and the English (already seen in the earlier quote from Marta) became particularly strong in relation to the approach to schooling and more generally to parenthood.

‘I think we (Poles) spend more time with our children’ (Jolanta).

Being a good parent was particularly important for women who had lost their career status through migration. As previous research highlighted (Ryan 2010b), Polish women do not simply follow their husbands but are actively involved in the family migration strategy, with the final decision often based on practical considerations. Thus, some Polish mothers may justify their decision to migrate and uproot their children in terms of good mothering:

‘I would love to polish my English, I am a qualified economist but without the knowledge of English it is difficult to find a good work... If I want to go to school, I won’t be able to work. If I give up my work, we won’t be able to afford what we have at the moment, for instance this flat’ (Zuzanna)
'In Poland I graduated in law, so you know... I do not feel bad [doing cleaning] but I would prefer to do something else. However, I am not so flexible in terms of time because I have to drop and collect Piotr from school so there is no great opportunity to have other kind of work'. (Jolanta)

Migrating to London may therefore mean loss of status and opportunities for parents, but it is presented as the best choice for children. In fact, Jolanta adds:

‘...after three years I also can say that it is better here, maybe not for me but for my child for certain... I think here Piotr will have more opportunities. In Poland we live in Lower Silesia and it is poor there. I cannot say we don’t have good universities but here he has greater opportunities’.

Zuzanna also recognised that for her daughter being fluent in English would be ‘a big advantage for her; if not here, in Poland, because there [knowing English] she would always manage. English language is fundamental, that’s what I think’.

THE CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES

As Grace Reynolds (2008: 12) points out “in order to understand children’s lives it is essential to talk to children themselves”. Although limited in number, the three interviews presented here offer some powerful examples of Polish pupils’ experiences in London schools. All three children were at secondary school and were aged between 13 and 14 years when the interviews were carried out in 2009. These children were not related to the parents discussed earlier in this paper.

Marek arrived in Britain in 2007 with his mother and sister to join his father who had already been working in London for several years. Although Marek was not keen to leave Poland, he realised that the family needed to be reunited and that his father did not want to return to Poland. Initially he found London ‘very difficult’ and he was also shocked by the hostility he encountered:

‘It wasn’t easy. I got different reactions from people. I was surprised, because I have heard that English people are not a racist people, but I was very wrong... They didn’t treat me like someone equal to them. I was an immigrant to them, who should not have come to this country’.

Being treated ‘like an immigrant’ comes as a shock. Marek feels that in general British people have a stereotypical view of Poles: ‘We are just workers
and builders for them... although many Polish builders are more clever than English... for them we are someone, who takes their jobs away’. Like the parents mentioned above, Marek compensates for negative stereotypes by suggesting that Poles are in fact cleverer than the English.

Marek was also of the view that the standard of education in Poland was superior to that in Britain: ‘I am depressed by the level of education here. Math, for example, I haven’t learnt anything new yet, which I didn’t know from Poland’. On the other hand he recognises that studying in England would give him better opportunities for the future: “The truth is that the level of education is not that important.(…) So if I finish any university here, even not that popular, it will be worth more than if I studied at [a university in Poland]”.

Although he had learned English in Poland, when he arrived in Britain he found that he did not understand anything people were saying.

‘At the beginning I didn’t know how to respond, my English wasn’t good enough to say what I wanted... besides I was scared. And they could see it straight away. Fortunately I had a Polish friend, who joined the school the same day when I did. It was easier when there were two of us. But he is different, he has got a stronger personality, he won’t let anyone say something bad to him. If he can’t answer with his words, he will answer with his fist. I’m not like that. I don’t like fighting and that’s why they chose me as their victim’.

Marek spoke very eloquently about how the language barrier inhibited him from being himself: ‘I can’t yet express myself well enough in English to show who I am. My English just doesn’t let me show them who I really am. When I speak English, I don’t really say what I would in Polish’. In a way, according to Marek, it is the language barrier that holds Poles from achieving their full potential.

Like the adult research participants, he also commented upon how difficult it is to make friends with English people:

‘English people stay in their groups and they don’t want to know someone new. There are some exceptions, because I have few English friends, not many... But most of my friends are other immigrants, who were born and grew up here, but they are completely different. I like Indians, as they are very positive about life, they are friendly. I have also friends from Mexico, Germany and Turkey’.
Hence, although some children may not initially like the idea of being seen as a migrant, some may find it easier to establish relationships with others from a migrant background, not just their own ethnic group (cfr. Ryan, 2010a).

While other Polish children have managed to make friends with their English peers, Marek suggests they may have achieved that by denying their Polishness:

‘There are many Polish students here, who don’t speak the Polish language, although they can. I know one guy, who only talks to English students. I have spoken to him once. Now he doesn’t talk to me or to any other Polish guys. He won’t even say “hello”. He is not Polish for me.’

Marek implies that being accepted means conforming to British cultural norms and in the case of girls this can result in a loss of modesty: ‘There are 3 Polish girls as well, but one of them is practically English – because of the way she behaves….very provocative, vulgar. They forgot what modesty is. A lot of Polish people change when they emigrate. Unfortunately, for worst.’

To an extent, Marek himself had to adjust his behaviour in order to settle in: “For some time I was a very fanatic Polish guy. With my every step, I had to show other people where I was from. When I was going out, I always wore a white and red scarf. I had a group of fanatic Polish friends. But that has finished. I grew up.” Marek is adamant that he won’t change his Polish identity, but he also acknowledges that since living in Britain, his relationship with Poland has changed in some ways: ‘When I went to Poland last summer, I was a bit bored. A lot of my friends have changed. They just drink and smoke… it doesn’t interest me… Although I don’t want to live there, I love Poland’.

Iwona also arrived in 2007 with her mother, while her father has remained in Poland. She sees the move as purely short term and is keen to return to Poland. Having been in Britain only two years at the time of the interview, she admits: ‘I do keep comparing everything to Poland’. Thus, one could argue that she has yet to switch her ‘cultural frame’. Like other participants she is critical of the British standard of education: ‘I think the level of education, (…) is lower and I worry about going back to school when we return home’. However, she does acknowledge that the style of teaching is very different in British schools and this can make lessons more interesting than the more formal approach in Poland: ‘In

\[10\] Gendered expectations of female modesty among migrants have also been discussed elsewhere, see Ryan 2010a.
Poland there is a lot of theory learning, here it is all put into practice and it makes lessons a lot more interesting plus it is easier to remember what one is learning.

Although she spoke no English upon arrival, she has improved quickly and acknowledges the support she received from the teachers: ‘but it was very hard, I couldn’t understand anything during the lessons and it is difficult to pinpoint when I started to, but somehow everything became clear. The teachers helped me a lot; they were giving me lists of words to learn’.

Iwona misses her friends in Poland very much and has found it difficult to make friends at school, in particular she found the English children unwelcoming. “Friends at the English school ask me a lot of questions, but they are stupid questions, e.g. do you have polar bears? And then when I told them I came from Poland by car they could not believe it. It seems they imagine that we stalk wild animals with spears in Poland”.

Like Marek, most of Iwona’s friends are also migrants: ‘I am friendly with girls from Africa and China. The English used to laugh at them, too (…) We understand one another because we have similar problems’. Overall, Iwona enjoys the cultural diversity of London schools: ‘I like the variety of cultures and the fact that one can learn so much about other people’s culture and countries of origin’.

Of the three children, Wioletta, who migrated in 2008, was by far the most positive about being in Britain. Following her parents’ divorce she moved to Britain with her father, while her mother remained in Poland. She had learned English in Poland and although she initially struggled to understand the English accent, she adapted to school quite well:

‘I was enrolled in the class which already had six other Polish students. At the beginning I was hanging around with them. I sat next to a Polish girl. She said she will take care of me, show me around and will take me to the classroom if I am lost. Obviously you feel lost in a new place. Also the teachers helped me a lot, they were aware that I might be a bit behind the rest at the beginning’.

Although - like Marek and Iwona – Wioletta also suggested that the Polish standard of education was much higher, she thought that the system in Britain suited her better: ‘I like the education system here. If I would have to go back to Poland, I am sure I would struggle in the Polish school, because here the education level is lower compared to the level of education in Polish schools.’
Wioletta also acknowledged that while other new arrivals may have difficulties making friends with British children, she had not had any problems:

‘Most of my friends and acquaintances are British. I get on with them really well, as well as with the kids with other nationalities. We meet after school and have fun. I know that not every one has good opinion about English youngsters. Sometimes the boys can be unbearable, I know they can be offensive towards the girls, but personally I have not had such experience. I guess, they think I am a tomboy and I like it that way’.

Unsurprisingly, given how well she has adapted to life in Britain, Wioletta does not want to return to Poland: ‘I do not want to go back to Poland. However, I miss my family and my friends there and that would be the only reason to go back. But I prefer to go to visit them rather than live there.’ Nonetheless, she keen to maintain her Polish identity: ‘regardless of how long I would live here, I always will be Polish’.

The varied experiences of these three young people suggest the complexity of migration for children. All three had been involved in some kind of family reunion, though in two cases close relatives had remained behind in Poland. The migration had been a project for their parents and they had little choice about it. Nonetheless, these children demonstrate an ability to consciously shift their self-representation and become active and strategic in establishing social networks, whether with other Poles, other migrants or ‘English’ pupils. Interestingly, all three young people speak about having friends from other cultures and in two cases, Iwona and Marek, they have found it much easier to be friends with children from ethnic minority groups. This seems to confirm Ackers and Stalford’s (2004) point that many migrant students befriend other migrants creating a sort of ‘migrant bubble’. However, as Goldstein (2003) points out, migrant children can in fact put in place parallel befriending strategies, establishing links with people who speak their first language to create social capital, but also befriending those who speak the host country’s language in order to achieve at school. In addition, as confirmed by Reynolds (2008: 14) language and ethnicity are not the only element driving friendship formation and children rely on “diverse range of bases for such friendship, including sport, music, fashion and an interest in reading”.

Although in very different ways, all three children describe their sense of being ‘in between’ two worlds and two cultures, with a sense of belonging split between Poland and the UK. In her study on migrant children in Irish schools, Devine (2209: 524) reached similar findings, describing how children “talked about their
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Our research findings chime with other studies (Adams and Kirova 2006; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Roer-Strier and Strier 2006) which show that pre-migration values and expectations, together with the experiences within the host society and the education system in particular, shape how migrant families negotiate and (re)construct their identities. Depending on individuals’ feelings and strategies, the school population, structure and the local education practices, this interplay of cultures can lead either to clashes between teachers and parents, with the children at the cross roads, or to a positive cultural frame switching, without necessarily denying ethnic culture and values. As Johnston et al. (2006:20) suggest, with appropriate policy and practice, multicultural schools can indeed become the place where “intercultural appreciation and respect can be nurtured through contact at crucial stages in personal development and socialisation”. However, this is a process that can take time and often involves adaptive strategies and cultural and social re-positioning. As Erel (2010) has argued, cultural capital is not merely transported from one country to another, but is validated by engaging with both ethnic majority and migrant institutions and networks.

Some adult Polish migrants may live their working and social life in a ‘Polish-bubble’; schools thus become the place where they first encounter and engage with British society and in particular with its education system. One of the first and main elements of ‘culture shock’ is the apparent informality of relationships between pupils and teachers and the British curriculum emphasis on learning through creativity, especially in primary schools, so different from the Polish educational model. The second element is the visible presence of multiculturalism, to which many Polish parents may not be used, sometimes leading to ‘racist’ reactions. At the same time, Polish families may experience racism and stereotyping which they had not anticipated, either from ‘White-English’ people or from ‘Ethnic Minorities’. This challenges assumptions about ‘who is the minority’, especially amongst EU citizens coming from a country still relatively culturally homogeneous. As Vertovec (2006: 26) suggests “the new immigration and super-diversity have also stimulated new definitions of ‘whiteness’ surrounding certain groups of newcomers’ – the Poles being a key example. At the same time, as Crawley (2009: 56) points out, associated with changing patterns in immigration, new forms of inequality, prejudice and racism are emerging, including “racism among native-born individuals targeted against newcomers (…), racism among long-standing
Sites of socialisation - Polish parents and children in London schools

ethnic minorities against newcomers (...), racism among newcomers directed against native-born ethnic minorities". These complex interactions between native-born, established migrant communities and newcomers may be played out in schools (Reynolds, 2008), causing further complications to processes of adaptation and integration.

Our study suggests that the adaptive strategies used by Polish parents and children to overcome these issues are quite similar. The English are seen as unfriendly, perhaps jealous of Poles, and in some cases even racist. On the other hand, Poles are regarded as clever, with only the language barrier preventing them from achieving their full potential. This can often lead, despite the initial shock about ethnic diversity, to establishing stronger links with other migrants on the basis of common experiences. Thus, ethnic identities are re-asserted and re-shaped not only in relation to the majority community (English) but also to other ethnic minority groups.

Although there is general consensus among the children, and some parents, that the teachers are usually very helpful and the curriculum is less rigid than in Poland, the English educational system is seen as less good. Nonetheless, as our findings demonstrate, parents also need to justify their decision to migrate either by saying it is a purely short term strategy or in the longer term it will be very beneficial for their children to speak English fluently. This view is also shared by several of the children. For women in particular, notions of mothering may be redefined in the context of migration (see also Erel, 2010; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010). Despite the downward mobility that some of the women had experienced, they tend to present their migration as positive for the family as a whole (see also Ryan and Sales, forthcoming). Thus, the women present themselves as self-sacrificing mothers whose own career opportunities have taken second place to the needs of their families. Overall, they suggest that their children will benefit in the long term from the migration to Britain.

Our findings have implications for understanding how migrant parent and children encounter, negotiate and adapt to schooling in the destination country. In particular, our research highlights that schools are not just places of learning for children but are sites of socialisation where migrant families can meet and engage with multicultural society especially in diverse cities such as London. This presents opportunities but also challenges for migrants as well as for teachers, pupils and other parents. The extent to which this process is smoothly managed by schools may determine how positively or negatively such encounters are experienced.
In addition, our findings also have implications for how family migration is understood. As noted, there has been a tendency to focus on post-accession migration as opening up opportunities for unfettered mobility especially for young, single economic actors (Ryan, 2011). However, our research illustrates the complexity and diversity of family migration and in particular how children may be affected by the mobility of their parents. Processes of adaptation may take longer than anticipated. This is not just a matter of learning a new language but also learning to socialise with a complex array of social actors including not only the native born but also other migrant communities. In that process Polish migrants may come to re-assert but also to re-define their own identities as migrants in multi-cultural Britain.

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