Realities and perceptions for English teachers of Polish children

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Realities and Perceptions for English Teachers of Polish Children

This chapter examines the responses of English primary school teachers to Polish children arriving in the south of England since 2006. Schools in England have a changing pupil demographic which reflects changing patterns of trans-European migration since the accession of new member states to the EU in 2004 and 2007. There is evidence that this shift is one experienced not just in inner-city schools most commonly associated with minority ethnic populations, but in a wide range of schools in rural and smaller town settings in a number of counties across the country. In adjusting to new identities and new languages in their classrooms, teachers in areas not previously associated with national or ethnic differences are required to respond pedagogically and pastorally in new ways. Their beliefs are compared with the views of migration held by Polish teachers' from one Polish town affected by migration. Interview data are analysed in order to explore differences in perception towards Polish migrant families and their children. Discussion centres on English teachers' very positive responses to Polish children, and of how the teacher-friendly behaviour of Polish families may support the construction of stereotypes that are not necessarily a reflection of reality as experienced by the children.

Migration and Teachers' responses to difference

We start with an exploration of the literature surrounding how teachers respond to children from different national and ethnic backgrounds. The minimisation of difference is a common theme identified by research when exploring how teachers respond to 'otherness' in their children from ethnic minority families (Bennett, 1998[1]; Goodwin, 2002[2]; Hoffman, 1996[3]; Mahon, 2006[4]). This

[1] Bennett, M. J. (Ed.). (1998). *Basic Concepts Of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings* Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press

[2] Goodwin, A. L. (2002). Teacher Preparation and the Education of Immigrant Children. *Education and Urban Society, 34*(2), 156-172

minimisation is characterised by an attempt to find similarity rather than embracing the possibility of diversity, and in teachers might be done for the best of reasons. For example, studies among teachers in the US have found that practitioners are loath to recognise difference overtly for fear that this acknowledgment is of itself a form of discrimination (Hoffman, 1996[5]; Mahon, 2006[6]). Thus, teachers' perceived unwillingness to embrace diversity in any detail is perhaps born of beliefs that 'seeing only the mind and heart of a child is best practice' (Mahon, 2006).

Where individuals have some knowledge of different cultures, they are more likely to be able to adopt an ethno-relative, rather than ethno-centric, approach to their relationships with people unlike themselves (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003[7]). The less experienced teachers are with responding to difference, the less likely they are to engage critically with their pupils' backgrounds (Hoffman, 1996) and thus allow some transformation of their own thinking. Mahon (2006) argues that this lack of acknowledgement of difference, this comfort with a white western world view, is the privilege of those who have the power to marginalise. Where English teachers are the holders of considerable social and cultural capital in the classroom, based on their ethnicity and the unacknowledged riches associated with being an English speaker (Bourdieu, 1991[8]), it is possible that this comparative wealth may render them less likely to question their own responses to migrant children and more likely to see similarity than difference.

The relationship between pupil ethnicity and teacher expectation is well documented. There are several studies from the UK clearly demonstrating a mismatch between teacher expectation and ethnic minority pupils' attainment potential (Gilborn & Mirza, 2000[9]; Pearce, 2003[10]) that

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[3] Hoffman, D. (1996). Culture and Self in Multicultural Education: Reflections on Discourse, Text, and Practice. *American Educational Research Journal, 33*(3), 545-569

[4] Mahon, J. (2006). Under the Invisibility Cloak? Teacher Understanding of Cultural Difference. *Intercultural Education, 17*(4), 391-405

[5] Hoffman, 1996, op cit

[6] Mahon, 2006, op cit

[7] Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*, 421-443

[8] Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press

[9] Gilborn, D., & Mirza, H. (2000). *Educational Inequality:Mapping race, class and gender*. London:OfSTED.

[10] Pearce, S. (2003). Compiling the White Inventory:the practice of whiteness in a British primary school. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 33*(2), 273-288

suggest a powerful link between a largely white profession and an under-achieving non-white pupil population. However, what is not clearly recorded, with the exception of some reports on Polish children in London schools (Sales, Ryan, Rodriguez, & Alessio, 2008[11]), is teacher response to the grouping known in the UK as 'white other' in which Polish children are now a significant percentage in some areas of the country.

Kitching's study in an Irish secondary school suggests that racialised construction of pupils' classroom identities is formed on lines that closely map to schools' and teachers' existing beliefs about identity (Kitching, 2011[12]): he suggests that when faced with both Black and Eastern European new migrant pupils, teachers are most likely to look for an image of the 'desirable learner' and respond favourably when they 'see' this. Thus, although it is not necessarily meaningful to generalise studies of teacher response to difference to white 'new arrivals', there is an emerging data set that suggests teachers look for generalised images of what they would like to see in their pupils and that this may play out differently across different nationalities as much as it might do across different ethnicities.

In this way, it is possible that Eastern European pupils in the UK are emerging as part of the 'model minority' myth that has been identified for Asian pupils in schools in the US (Flynn, 2013[13]; Li, 2005[14]; Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007[15]). The dilemma for the model minority student is that teachers' hopes of them are set so high, based on generalised expectations from either previous experience or simply on perception, that where pupils' academic outcomes don't match teachers' expectations of their potential, their performance may be interpreted unfairly and responsibility for improvement is seen as lying with the pupil rather than with the teacher (Li, 2005, p. 75). Furthermore, there is evidence that teachers expect more of parents of their model minority pupils, particularly in relation to their capacity to teach their children English at home (p. 80).

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[11] Sales, R., Ryan, L., Rodriguez, M. L., & Alessio, D. A. (2008). *Polish Pupils in London Schools: opportunities and challenges*. Middlesex: Multiverse and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Middlesex

[12] Kitching, K. (2011). Interrogating the changing inequalities constituting 'popular' 'deviant' and 'ordinary' subjects of school/subculture in Ireland: moments of new migrant student recognition, resistance and recuperation. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 14*(3), 293-311

[13] Flynn, N. (2013). Encountering migration: English primary school teachers' responses to Polish children. *Pedagogies:An International Journal, 8*(4), 336 - 351

[14] Li, G. (2005). Other People's Success: Impact of the 'Model Minority' Myth on Underachieving Asian Students in North America. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy, 2*(1), 69 - 86

[15] Ng, J. C., Lee, S. S., & Pak, Y. K. (2007). Contesting the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner Stereotypes: A Critical Review of Literature on Asian Americans in Education. *Review of Research in Education, 31*, 95-130

The Shifting Field and a 'New Migration'

In the first part of the twenty first century super-diversity characterises neighbourhoods in UK cities and more recently in smaller towns and villages (Vertovec, 2007[16], 2010[17]). Ethnic diversity in UK school communities has previously been associated with inner-city school settings; however, among the number of migrants coming to the UK since 2004 are citizens from EU accession states, who are settling in areas not previously associated with migrant populations. Of these a significant number are Polish and by late 2010 Poles made up one of the three largest non-UK born population groups in all countries and most regions in the UK (ONS, 2011[18]). These Polish workers and their families are often referred to as part of a 'new migration' (Favell, 2008[19]).

Favell (2008) asserts that the enlargement of the EU since 2004 poses the biggest demographic change in Europe since the end of the second world war because these 'new migrants' have rights to work and to move freely within EU countries as European citizens: this makes comparison with Post-colonial and US theories of race, migration and ethnicity largely redundant (p.706). This 'new migrant' identity bears particular relevance in education in the UK because professional discourse and culturally focussed initiatives in the past 15 years have tended to focus around the attainment of Black and Asian pupils who are perceived as linked with Britain's colonial past, or with children of asylum seekers (DfES, 2003[20]; Tikly, Haynes, Caballero, Hill, & Gillborn, 2006[21]). Apart from guidance related to the teaching of gypsy, Roma and traveller children (DCSF, 2008[22]) there is no explicit nationality separation of the group referred to in

[16] Vertovec, S. (2007). Superdiversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 30*(6), 1024-1054

[17] Vertovec, S. (2010). Towards post-multiculturalism? Changing communities, conditions and contexts of diversity. *International Social Science Journal, 61*(199), 83-95

[18] ONS. (2011). *Polish People in the UK*. London: http://www.statistics.gov.uk

[19] Favell, A. (2008). The New Face of East-West Migration in Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 34*(5), 701-716

[20] DfES. (2003). *Aiming High: Raising Achievement of Ethnic Minority Pupils*. London: DfES

[21] Tikly, L., Haynes, J., Caballero, C., Hill, J., & Gillborn, D. (2006). *Evaluation of Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Project*. Nottingham: DCSF

[22] DCSF. (2008). *The Inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People* (No. 00063-2008DOM-EN). Nottingham: DCSF

pupil data collection as 'white other'. Thus the modulation to less obvious 'difference' in the classroom is relatively under reported and unmentioned in professional dialogue in the UK.

There is a confidence recognised in relation to Polish migrants which fosters the perception that they are part of a different type of migration (Favell, 2008[23]; Garapich, 2008[24]). They have tapped in to structures which support the rapid growth of social capital; notably a burgeoning of Polish newspapers, website and radio stations which have facilitated all aspects of the process of moving to a new country (Garapich, 2008). Polish mothers in the UK also appear to have built considerable social capital through dynamic social networks in their own and the host community (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008[25], 2009[26]). There is of course an argument that Poles are allowed access to social and economic capital because of differences in the way that 'new migration' is constructed by the press and national policy (Warren, 2007[27]), but not all research builds such a positive picture of recent Polish migration. Observations have also been made that attitudes to new migrants are no different from those towards previous generations of new arrivals; ignorance about people's home countries, tendency towards negative stereotypes and limited social contact between British people and Eastern Europeans are all recorded as part of the new migrants' experience (Spencer, Rhus, Anderson, & Rogaly, 2007[28]). The media, which on the one hand have played a very positive role in building social capital for the new Polish community, have, in mainstream publications, also fuelled alarmist and erroneous responses focussing on easy accessibility to employment, housing and benefits (Berkley, Khan, & Ambikaipaker, 2006[29]; Gaine, 2007[30]; Spencer, et al., 2007).

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[23] Favell, 2008, op cit

[24] Garapich, M. (2008). The Migration Industry and Civil Society: Polish Immigrants in the United Kingdom Before and After EU Enlargement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 34*(5), 735-752

[25] Ryan, L., Sales, R., Tilki, M., & Siara, B. (2008). Social Networks, Social Support and Social Capital. *Sociology, 42*(4), 672-690

[26] Ryan, L., Sales, R., Tilki, M., & Siara, B. (2009). Family Strategies and Transnational Migration: Recent Polish Migrants in London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 35*(1), 61-77

[27] Warren, S. (2007). Migration, race and education: evidence-based policy or institutional racism? *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 10*(4), 367 - 385

[28] Spencer, S., Rhus, M., Anderson, B., & Rogaly, B. (2007). *Migrants' Lives Beyond the Workplace*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

[29] Berkley, R., Khan, O., & Ambikaipaker, M. (2006). *What's new about new immigrants in twenty-first century Britain?* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

[30] Gaine, C. (2007). *Recent Immigration to the Chichester District: Scale and Impact*. Chichester: University of Chichester

It is useful at this point to explore some of the historical context which has led to the recent migration from Poland because this allows some insight in to the reasons for Polish families seeking work and life in England. Following the advent of democratisation in 1989 Poland was seen as something of a trendsetter in Eastern Europe and the model for a positive force for change in aspiration to become more like Western Europe (Onis, 2004[31]). The desire to become more European was supported both civilly and by government, creating a relatively homogeneous view of the advantages of EU membership. Conversely, Russia became part of a negative discourse following rejection of past soviet influence (Zarycki, 2004[32]). The preference for a European over a Russian identity will have supported the development of some relative values around language and lifestyle: in brief, economic capital is associated with use of English which is in turn seen as a passport to better living standards. The wish to assimilate European norms will have facilitated Polish migrants' relationships with their new countries' communities as they aspired to become part of 'something better' (Onis, 2004). Their desire to integrate will have been a strong driver for the formation of bridging capital (Puttnam, 2007[33]) which unites new with host communities where conditions are favourable.

Warren warns us that drawing distinctions between old and new migration is not only unhelpful, but has made the situation in schools worse: he considers that it encourages differential responses to different communities of minority ethnic pupils and discourse that defines good and bad types of migration (Warren, 2007[34]). Conversely, there is a view that *not* acknowledging this difference is also obstructive because it encourages a minimisation of difference when a detailed understanding of the characters of different communities, their reasons for being here and their differing affiliations to host communities, would support a more tailored response to need (Vertovec, 2007[35]). In Vertovec's view the super-diversity of Britain is something that surpasses older narrative around a 'multicultural society' and we risk failing to acknowledge that

[31] Onis, Z. (2004). Diverse but Converging Paths to European Union Membership: Poland and Turkey in Comparative Perspective. *East European Politics and Societies, 18*(3), 481-512

[32] Zarycki, T. (2004). Uses of Russia: The Role of Russia in the Modern Polish Identity. *East European Politics and Societies, 18*(4), 595-627

[33] Puttnam, R. (2007). *E Pluribus Unum*:Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century;The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandanavian Political Studies, 30*(2), 137-174.

[34] Warren, 2007, op cit

[35] Vertovec, 2007, op cit

community differences go well beyond the historical discourse attached to ethnicity (Vertovec, 2010[36]).

Following the population shift since, among other events, EU accession, teachers throughout England are increasingly likely to receive children of different nationalities in their classrooms; this presents challenges in particular for regions unaccustomed to managing a diverse pupil population and the attending need for language support and intercultural awareness in school staff. Furthermore, it bestows on schools a need to support children who are not necessarily ethnically different but who are nationally different. Following the experience of one English county where the number of Polish children rapidly increased after 2004, the following data tracks how one group of English primary school teachers responded to families from the most recent wave of Polish migration to the UK. It compares the interviews with English teachers with those of two Polish teachers interviewed during 2010 whose views were sought specifically to explore and unpick the responses of the English teachers to Polish children.

Data collection:

Interviews were conducted with eleven teachers in five primary schools (ages 5 – 11 years) in one county in the south of England during 2007 – 2009, and with staff who worked for the local education authority as part of the ethnic minority achievement service: it is worth noting that this county, although considered very different and more affluent from those attached to major conurbations in England, has a history of well-regarded support for pupils whose home language of not English. However, this support is spread thin – chiefly because the pupils are in schools in very small numbers - and consists of 10 hours of help with language in the classroom when children first arrive; this is followed up with additional support for teachers or children if schools choose to buy in to the service.

Conversations with the teachers had intentionally focussed on their views of how they adapted their pedagogy to accommodate the English language learning needs of their Polish pupils, but the interview responses recorded in this chapter relate to a set of wider attitudes that emerged to

[36] Vertovec, 2010, op cit

the children and their parents. Quite often discourse would stray in to narrative around the children's families because family support was perceived as integral to children's academic success by teachers, and they found it difficult to focus on how they taught their Polish children without also discussing how their parents support them. Thus, the interviews in Poland in 2010, with two teachers in an area of north-eastern Poland, were to enhance understanding of the context from which these children and their families had moved, and also to explore some of the findings from a different perspective. There was an emerging sense from the data analysis of a difference between reality and perception among the English teachers, in terms of their understanding of the home lives of their Polish children, and this was usefully explored in conversation with the Polish teachers. The interview data from Polish teachers were scrutinised to throw light on where perceptions might or might not be realities for the Polish migrant families.

Sample:

The following presentation of data draws on interviews with four of the English teachers who taught in one school, in order that the match of data to the Polish teacher interviews is balanced in terms of comparing single school settings and their responses to Polish migration. Teachers in the English schools were selected using pupil admissions data from the county's database, and schools which had admitted Polish children during 2006-7 were invited to take part in interviews.

The English teachers worked in a primary school in a small town surrounded by rural areas, with a population of more than 90% white British. The school itself had always admitted very small numbers of children from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds, but had experienced a rise in ethnic minority and new migrant pupils between 2004 and 2008: from 2004 when under 10% of pupils were other than white British (one or two children in each class) to 2008 when 17% of pupils (28 in total in a school roll of 169) were from non-British families. Of this 17%, 6 of the children were Polish, had arrived in quick succession, and were in classes throughout the school. The apparent concentration of new arrivals from Poland was mirrored in the rest of the county where, by 2012, Polish had become the highest non-British nationality in the county's population. The four teachers ranged from relatively newly qualified to over 20 years' experience in the classroom, and they taught children in the age range from 4 to 11 years.

Interviews took place between 2007 and 2008: each teacher was interviewed at the beginning and end of the school year. Schooling from 5 years old is compulsory in England, and most children start as 4 year olds in the school year in which they will become 5. Primary school teachers have their classes for one year and teach them every subject in the National Curriculum. For 4 – 5 year olds the curriculum is designed for early years and is focussed on integrated areas of learning, but from 5 – 11 years children are taught all curriculum subjects.

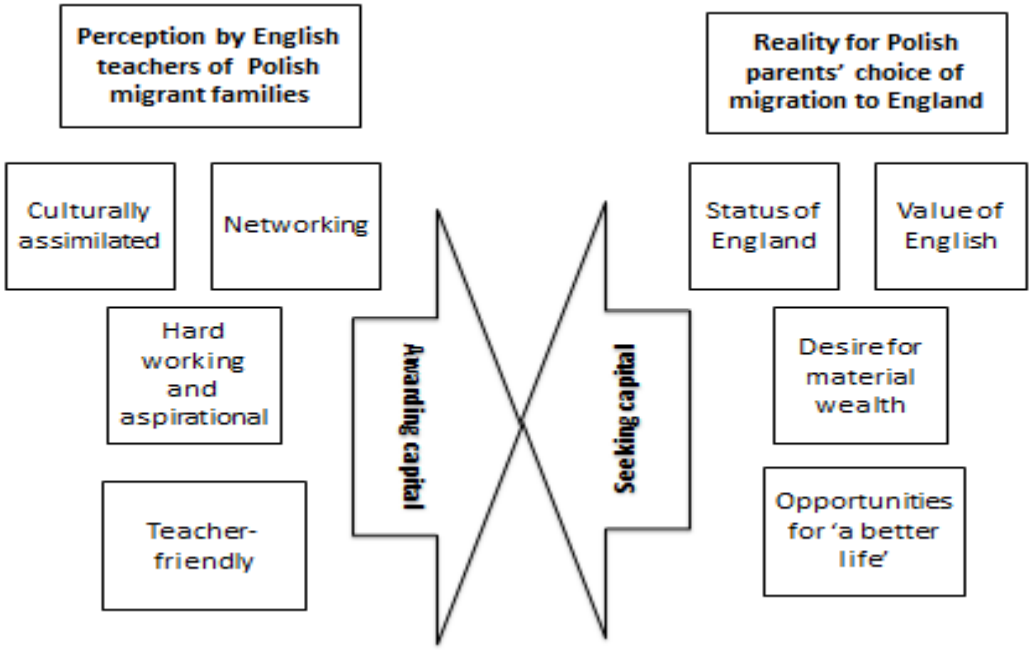
The Polish teachers were an opportunity sample provided through contacts at a university in Warsaw. They lived and worked in a town in North East Poland which had experienced substantial migration to England. The school was very large by English primary school standards; a roll of 850, and for children aged 7 – 13 years. The two teachers interviewed were each responsible for single subject areas: a recently qualified male teacher was the teacher of English to all ages and a more experienced female teacher taught ICT to children aged 10 – 13. Interviews took place in 2010 and were conducted to provide some perspective for the emerging themes from analysis of the interviews with teachers in England.

Table 1: Sample teachers

	Name	Years in service	Age of children taught at point of interview	School setting
English teachers	Dee	20	6/7 year olds	160 pupil Primary school (4 – 11): small town in South of England
	Nicola	11	10/11 year olds	
	Alison	4	8/9 year olds	
	Claire	25	4/5 year olds	
Polish teachers	Piotr	2	Teaches English to 7 – 10 year olds	850 first and middle (7 – 13) school: large town in north east Poland
	Gracja	15	Teaches IT to 10 – 13 year olds	

English Teachers' attitudes towards Polish families

Fig.1 Comparing English teachers' views of Polish families with Polish teachers' views of their reasons for migration



The various views and experiences of the Polish that emerged during interview were based on the teachers' interaction with their pupils in class and with their families as part of wider school life. Interestingly there was no measurable change in perceptions between the first and second interviews: rather the conversations at the end of the school year confirmed the opinions expressed the previous autumn. Key themes included that Polish families were hard-working and aspirational in their desire for 'a better life'; that they used social networks for support of their children's education; and that they generally behaved in a way that is teacher-friendly. There was also a sense that Polish parents actively sought integration and cultural assimilation, and that this was seen as praiseworthy; conversely there was also recognition that Polish families worked hard at retaining a sense of their Polish identity and this too was perceived positively. This relationship is in keeping with Vertovec's assertion that a transnational identity supports rather

than inhibits the assimilation of new migrant families in some communities (2007[37]). Three of the four English teachers referred repeatedly to Polish parents' hard-working characters; this meant hard-working as employees, often in several jobs, but also hard-working in their role as parents of school-aged children (Fig.2).

Fig 2 English teacher's view of Polish parents as hard-working and aspirational

Dee	*"... they want to get through to their children 'the reason you are here is to have a better life' and they say that to us too. Their attitude is brilliant it really is."* *"Right from the beginning of the year she said I want my child to do well. Constantly asking, ... which is very encouraging. I wish all parents would do it!"*
Nicola	*"They're passing their aspirations on to their children, and that makes them different, because not all of the other children are aspirational. They are here because they want to get on, and want their children to get on."*

Comments such as those above were consistent with the other English teachers in the sample and in the wider sample of the project which gathered data from 11 teachers with varying levels of experience. Although there was some variation on this theme, in that occasionally families were not seen as aspirational/ supportive, in the main the positive response to Polish families was very dominant in conversation. In fact where Polish parents were perceived as less supportive – usually coined in terms of their being less active in developing their children's learning of English – this was commented on negatively; it was almost as if English teachers expressed some disappointment when Polish parenting didn't conform to the norms that had been constructed by their more positive interactions with the majority. This is perhaps evidence of a developing 'model minority' view of Polish children among English teachers.

Overall, however, the Polish families appeared to have made very favourable impressions on their children's teachers, and this rested largely on their teacher-friendly behaviours of helping

[37] Vertovec, 2007, op cit

their children with their work, always appearing at parents' evening, working hard rather than living on benefits (ONS, 2011[38]) and generally behaving in respectful and courteous ways to the practitioners involved in their children's education. By, consciously or unconsciously, reflecting the positive requirements in English teachers' habitus, the Polish families appeared to have quickly acquired social capital which allowed them access to opportunities for their children: in behaving in ways that teachers find pleasing, they were able to seek and gather help from schools to improve their children's educational chances. The English teachers were happy to provide this help because they saw Polish families' wish for a better life - that is, a life that living in England can offer them – as their wish for cultural assimilation, which of itself appeared to be something prized by the profession. That is not to say that the teachers did not value home culture, or wished to downplay the differences inherent in their Polish children's backgrounds, but Polish families' apparent hunger for their children's success supported the development of good home-school relationships.

A facet of the hard-working/aspirational characteristic, according to the English teachers, was the Polish families' capacity to network and seek support from, for example, the more fluent English speakers within their local community. All of the teachers in this school commented on how Polish parents always responded to letters home, even when they could not read them; it was known that they would get either another parent or an older sibling who had acquired more English to read them so that they could respond accordingly. Polish families' capacity to ensure that their children always had the right things at the right time was very highly regarded.

A specific example of Polish parental behaviour which demonstrates clearly one family's tenacity in securing social capital was reported by Claire. Claire taught a 4 year old boy, Albin, who, along with his mother, had been very distressed at starting school. Over the course of the academic year Claire commented on several actively constructive moves Albin's mother had made to secure her place in the school's parental community. Firstly, the mother had enrolled in English courses so that she could help her son and so that she could communicate with Claire at parents' evening. Secondly, the mother had also invited her son's friends to his 5th birthday party; the invitations extended to the whole class and included English, other European and British-Asian children. Claire was full of admiration for this young mother who had arrived with

[38] ONS, 2011, op cit

no English but who, within a year, was operating within cultural norms expected by both the teacher and parents' groups (Fig 3).

Fig 3: Specific examples of efforts towards social and cultural acceptance

Claire	"*So she is becoming much more fluent and at the last parent interview, I can't remember when that was, I mean she didn't have her little notebook this time, she actually did the speaking."* *"The confidence to have a party ……and it was a mixture of children, it was a mixture of nationalities, it was a mixture of abilities. Especially the confidence of the parents who find English quite difficult, and I think they live in a flat too, so you know, there was this smiling group of children (in a photograph) with party hats on and so on, and I thought what a lovely thing to happen. When I think how that first day he was like a little scared rabbit and his mum was a little scared rabbit, you know, and now they're so different; fascinating."*

In is obvious from this extract that Claire is as pleased for the family as she might be for a child in her class. For many in the profession, the wish to care, to make a difference, and to 'touch lives' will have been a motivating attraction to teaching (Moore, 2004[39]). In working alongside socially-assimilating new migrant families, teachers are able to gain rapid positive results which support their view of themselves as successful practitioners: parents and children are happy and flourishing, and this feeds a virtuous circle whereby teachers also feel productive, making good relationships clearly cemented in school.

To summarise at this point: in this small sample, English teachers' view of Polish parents is that they have to come England to make a better life for themselves, and their aspiration to do this leads them to work hard and to support their children's success in school. Something that was interesting in analysing interview transcripts was that the phrase 'to make a better life' was not defined by either interviewer or subject during the conversations; we sat in tacit agreement that this was something of a given and which needed no exploration. Deep in our English teacher

[39] Moore, A. (2004). *The Good Teacher: Dominant discourses in teaching and teacher education*. London: Routledge

habitus was inferred understanding of what this meant and an unacknowledged acceptance that it described an aspiration to something enriching. Reasons for migration as a choice in Polish parents were discussed with the two teachers in Poland, and Piotr's responses in particular throws an interesting light on how values are constructed in relation to different nations' perceptions of themselves and others.

Figure 4: Polish teacher's views of Polish parents' choice to migrate to England

Piotr	*"After Communism we looked to the West as a developed model for Poland, and English is the language of the developed Europe and America."* *"Learning English, I think maybe fifty per cent, the decision to go to England… fifty per cent to earn money. Also, they want their children to learn English in a natural environment."*

Starting with the idea of the 'better life', Piotr described Polish parents' wish to better themselves and to have more opportunities as the driver behind their choice of migration, but his conversation revealed a complexity that challenges the somewhat bland assumptions about 'a better life' that any of us might label all migrant families with (Fig, 4). Aside from better chances for economic well-being, the parents were seen as having taken a long term view that moving to England would give their children opportunities that they had not had themselves Hugely important to the Polish teachers was that their relatively recent break with Russian rule brought with it a desire to become more European (Onis, 2004[40]). This manifested itself strongly as a desire to come to England because England is seen as the model for a new Europe. Perhaps more important than England being a role model is that England has that most prized of possessions – English spoken by native English speakers. So Piotr was clear that the parents wanted a better life for their children because they thought that this was something they could gain if their children learned English in England. The English teachers knew that the Polish families wanted a better life, but they were not sensitive to this very precise driver for migration

[40] Onis, 2004, op cit

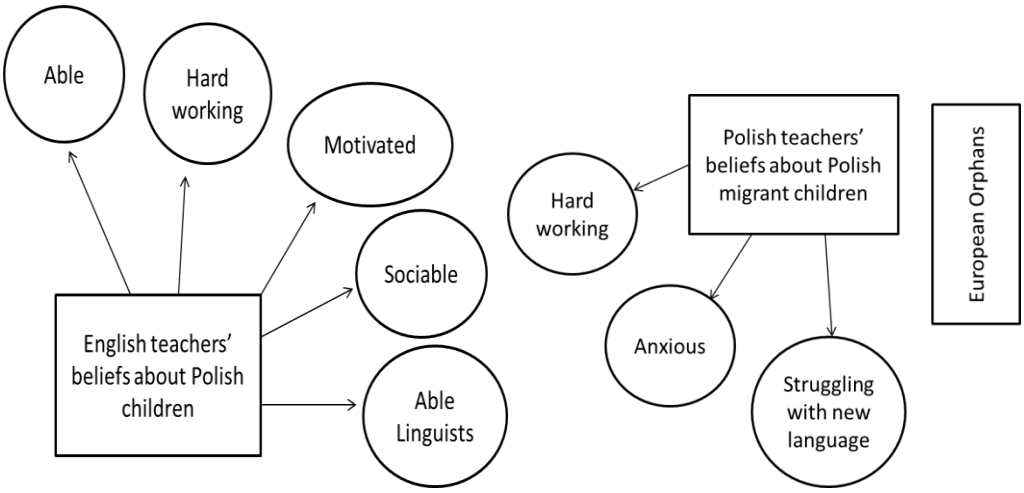
and therefore not aware of the amount of capital they themselves held effortlessly as English speakers.

A second response to Polish parents which I took to the Polish teachers for exploration was that of their being hard-working. In their view of Polish parents as being aspirational, the English teachers had quickly generalised the construct of all Poles as hard-working and aspirational despite there being some evidence of individual difference among families. For Piotr, it was clear that in the UK we see only one type of Polish family and that this colours any response to the country and its citizens. His view was that migrant workers are likely to be those who have high aspirations because they have the confidence to travel and to seek opportunity abroad. However, there are others who would not have this confidence and who would stay at home. Similarly, he was sceptical that Poles are necessarily harder working any other European nation, because, again, those who are not hard-working would be unlikely to migrate and are therefore not visible to foreigners in receiving countries. In other words, his view was that the generalised construction of Poles created by English teachers is somewhat rose-tinted and more a perception than a reality.

So, there is clearly some difference between what English teachers think of Polish parents, and Polish parents' reasons for being in England. Nevertheless, the way in which Polish parents are seeking a better life appears to manifest itself in a set of behaviours which are teacher-friendly and which attract teachers in to good relationships with them. Thus, the parents come seeking capital in many forms and are awarded it by the teachers chiefly in the form of social capital because they appear to know the rules of the field and can share in the group habitus of the school.

Teacher-friendly Polish children in English classrooms:

Figure 5: Differing views of Polish children's classroom identity



The qualities celebrated in parents were also something noted in Polish children by their English teachers (Fig. 5). They commonly described them with the same range of adjectives; hard-working, motivated and sociable. In addition the children were also frequently referred to as very able and as confident in the classroom. High attainment was evident in their apparently rapid development of spoken English and their capacity to perform well according to the age-related norms in the English curriculum. High attainment was noted not just for younger children, who might be expected to flourish given a more play and talk-based curriculum in the early years, but also for children arriving in Key Stage 2 (age 7 – 11) who ended school with scores comparable to their English peers in the national tests sat by 11 year olds in England . Thus teachers perceived Polish children as a whole as very able, and this became part of the same virtuous circle observed in teacher-parent relations

Figure 6: Positive response to Polish pupils from English teachers

Nicola	**"**Everything you teach they want to devour and put in to practice." " I think the reason I don't see this (teaching Polish new arrivals) as a burden is because they want to learn and they have a positive attitude; and that's what teachers want, that's why teachers teach."
Alison	"They've integrated very well. They don't necessarily spend time together." "I'm surprised how quickly they pick up the language. Very, very quickly; he is a very bright child and before I knew it he didn't need any help."

Looking at Nicola's comments in particular (Fig. 6) it is apparent that teacher satisfaction is very closely bound up with both high attainment and an accompanying willingness to learn. Interestingly, Polish children were among a small mixed group of children from other countries which had arrived at intervals during 2004 - 2006. Thus, Nicola was comparing her Polish children with both indigenous children and those from other countries and they appeared to come out very favourably. One explanation could be that the school served a socially-mixed catchment where most families were on low incomes, and the indigenous population in particular were not perceived by the teachers to be particularly ambitious for their children. So it is perhaps the case that the levels of motivation, academic confidence and aspiration in the Polish children were something of a breath of fresh air for teachers more used to dealing with a need to promote aspiration in children and their families. The teachers in the English school were sensitive to this and took great pains to explain their efforts not to appear more positive towards their Polish children. In fact, an inspiring characteristic of all the teachers interviewed for this project was their unquestioning acceptance of their role to do their best for all of their children.

When asked if he thought that Polish children were actually more willing and able in the classroom than other nationalities, Piotr was sceptical. He commented instead that *'when someone is abroad, the environment is new, and so you must be aware, you must listen and be more careful'*. His view was that the behaviours of children in class are more likely related to their anxiety to make progress in a foreign country, than that they necessarily have more

aspiration to learn. Gracja also referred to children's anxiety rather than confidence in their learning abroad. She was aware that children worried a lot about learning English and had reported difficulties learning it when they came home to Poland for holidays. Thus, the children's classroom identity in England was one of application to study based on anxiety to do well, and this was read by English teachers as confidence and high ability that was a part of their Polish identity.

The positive reception of the Polish children by English teachers might have related to their feeling that they were giving them a better education – a more enjoyable education - than they had received at home. Their understanding that this was the case rested on what they were told by Polish families about education in Poland, and so they developed a set of beliefs based on the available information. Add to this the fact that English teachers mostly believed that children in Poland received little education prior to 6 or 7, and a sense of the importance of what they were providing would have grown further. It is interesting that Polish parents did not seem to have disabused their children's teachers of the idea that their children had not been to school. Perhaps differences in educational expectations between the two countries simply meant that the children's educational background was left unexplored. If we contrast this with the usual wealth of material about pre-school experience that comes as part of normal school induction for English children, it is obvious that migrant children come with information only from their families and this will be another factor contributing to the minimisation of difference and the maintenance of existing beliefs which may well be erroneous.

The community in the area where the Polish teachers taught had experienced less positive aspects of migration than English teachers were observing. This negative experience was summed up by the phrase 'European orphans' which had developed specifically to describe those children left behind when one parent, most commonly a father, migrates without the family. This phrase was used by Gracja, and was clearly a construction of childhood that had become a norm for this particular Polish primary school. She noted that there had been an increase in children with behavioural difficulties when they came from homes where one parent was abroad working and the other was also working while trying to raise the family alone. She spoke of a rising number of children who go home to an empty house and the impact of this on their emotional well-being and educational outcomes. Given that behaviour was something the school

had worked hard at over time, and that expectations of good behaviour were high, this new development was clearly a frustration for the staff and one somewhat beyond their control.

The impact of being European orphans was not necessarily one that manifested itself just in poor behaviour. Gracja recounted experiences of children in her classes who had developed a new status because of the wealth associated with having a parent working in Western Europe (Fig. 7)

Figure 7: Impact of lone parent migration on children's relationships in class

Gracja: *The children that I have in my class don't have a problem with their learning (because of one parent's absence), but they do set great store by the fact that Dad is earning lots of money and he sends home lots of money. Those are the things that matter to them.*

Gracja's comments drew a picture of a new wealthy class emerging in both the school and the community it served, which changed the dynamic of children's relationships with each other. Although the school served some families which were already relatively wealthy, she had noted a difference in classes where there were children from families who were not prosperous. The social division growing between haves and have-nots was considered quite destructive for pupil relationships, and was a new issue for the Polish teachers to have to deal with. Thus, just as teachers in England had to respond to immigration in their schools, teachers in Poland had to respond to the impact of emigration from theirs.

Discussion

For English teachers, Polish children arrive in school supported by families who aspire to great things for them, and this supersedes other concerns such as why the family have migrated and the possible impact on the child of moving in to a very different school system. It is likely that teachers in English schools see only those Polish families who have managed to migrate as a unit, albeit over time; the evidence is that often fathers come first and mothers and children follow later (Ryan, et al., 2009[41]). Thus, the perception of the English teacher might commonly

[41] Ryan, L., Sales, R., Tilki, M., & Siara, B. (2009), op cit

be of a stable family unit for whom migration appears a positive choice and one founded on very high aspiration for something better. Moreover, the experience of only the end of the migration process means that teachers are not engaged with the families when disruption to their lives through separation may have been traumatic for both parents and children. It may also mean that English teachers are unlikely to understand just how profound the shift in family life has had to be in order to accommodate a move to a foreign country and a foreign education system. The behaviour of Polish families was complicit in this to some extent, because it was only where children were very young – such as Albin arriving in Reception – that teachers reported anxiety and problems with settling. It is very likely that most children will have had to adapt to a very different school experience and that this of itself is likely to have caused anxieties of the type described by Piotr and Gracja, but this does not appear to have been where the focus of conversation was between parents and teachers in this one school. In this way, Polish parents unwittingly protected English teachers from needing to engage with details and thus unconsciously encouraged the minimisation of difference.

The ways in which the school provided a nurturing environment for several types of capital, were complicated by subtleties of expectation in both the teachers and the families. The 'right' classroom identity – sometimes explicit, sometimes buried – is something very clearly mapped out on the consciousness of teachers and something that Polish children appeared to tap in to very successfully . In this way Polish children have perhaps become a 'model minority' in the eyes of English teachers (Flynn, 2013[42]). So successfully in fact that it seems that the English teachers thought that these children quickly moved on from needing much support; a phenomenon observed in Sales' report from London schools (Sales, et al., 2008[43]). There are several potential dangers here: the perception that all Polish children are high attaining may set them up for failure as they grow older and the curriculum in secondary school becomes more demanding: moreover, the attribution of inflated levels of capital by teachers may increase pressure on children who are already anxious to perform and could ultimately lead to demotivation.

[42] Flynn, 2013, op cit
[43] Sales, R., Ryan, L., Rodriguez, M. L., & Alessio, D. A. (2008), op cit

As children and families appeared to conform generally to a set of highly regarded attributes, so teachers constructed very favourable images of Poles that at times meant they risked prizing them over their English pupils. However, as this research had focussed deliberately on the arrival of Polish families, and on a set of teachers in only one region of England, the findings are not generalisable. For some teachers the Polish children represented their first experience of non-British children in the classroom, and I cannot assume that the same response might not be common to any non-British national: in fact this is just the danger that Warren[44] warns of in seeking to analyse one community's migration as better than another's . That said, within the case study presented by this English school, the reception of Polish children and their families does have a largely uniform quality to it that suggests teachers attribute certain characteristics to Polish families that they might not to other migrant families.

English teachers appear to find shared values with Polish families and therefore award them social capital: on the one hand this promotes growth in social capital for Polish and maybe other Eastern European families, but on the other hand it encourages teachers to minimise difference and not engage with realities for the struggle these families have had in building a new life in England. Polish families in this study had emerged, in the eyes of their children's teachers, as very successfully bi-cultural and this of itself may mean that children of other ethnicities whose families do not traditionally have this level of confidence and social capital, or English low-income families, may not compare well: more research in to teacher-response to other communities within the new super-diversity in English classrooms is much needed to test this hypothesis , and analysis of national data sets pertaining to the attainment of pupils who are 'white other' needs a much more finely tuned response to track the academic outcomes of pupils from nationalities associated with the new migration.

[44] Warren, 2007, op cit, p.372

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