



Moskal, M. (2014) Language and cultural capital in school experience of Polish children in Scotland. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*

Copyright © 2014 Taylor and Francis.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

The content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/93969/>

Deposited on: 15 June 2015

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University  
of Glasgow <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Moskal, M. (2014) Language and cultural capital in school experience of Polish children in Scotland. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Online First.

## **Language and Cultural Capital in School Experience of Polish Children in Scotland**

**Marta Moskal, University of Glasgow**

### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the complex relationship between migration and education in the context of recent intra-European labour mobility. It considers how this mobility impacts the education and life chances of migrant students attending schools in Scotland, UK. By examining the experiences of Polish migrant children and youth at schools in Scotland, the paper engages with the issues of language, cultural capital transferability and social positioning. Drawing on qualitative data from 65 in-depth interviews with school children aged 5–17 years, their parents and teachers, as well as observations in the contexts of school and home, the paper points to a range of factors affecting the transition of migrant pupils to new schools and social environments.

**Keywords:** Migrant children, cultural capital, language learning, education, qualitative research

### **Introduction**

Political and economic integration within the EU encourages the free movement of workers and their families among EU member countries. This increasing mobility of people between European countries has important implications for educators, because it generates cultural and linguistic diversity within schools. Although schools in Europe have experienced this diversity for many years, it remains the subject of controversy (Ribolzi 2007, Heckmann et al. 2008). Educational policies and practices regarding diversity vary widely between countries and even within countries. The case of Scotland within the UK provides a good example for analysis, because migrant children and youth from Poland comprise the fastest-growing segment of the Scottish school-age population (Scottish Government Pupil Census - Supplementary Data 2012).

At the same time that schools throughout Europe face the challenge of educating a growing percentage of migrant pupils, the process of globalisation is imposing demands on educators to facilitate the development of complex skills and competencies. Schools are challenged to prepare students for engagement with a wide range of cultures in order for them to develop into globally conscious and culturally competent citizens (Hugonnier 2007, Suárez-Orozco and Sattin-Bajaj 2010). The transition of migrant children to new countries is difficult. Their cultural capital may not be valued by the host society, and may be devalued by schools (Leopold and Shavit 2011). Young migrants are often identified by education systems as a ‘problem’ that consumed valuable resources, which may pose a threat to the identity of the host society (Suárez-Orozco, Darbes, Dias and Sutin 2011).

Equal of opportunities in the educational systems are a precondition for the success of newly arrived migrant children and youth in the receiving countries. However, due to existing structural inequalities as well as social and cultural barriers,

these young people continue experiencing cumulative disadvantage within the education system of a receiving country that is likely to impact on their future life chances (Darmody, Byrne and McGinnity 2014: 146). The educational attainment of migrant pupils varies considerably across different national systems (OECD Pisa 2006). The European Commission's Green Paper 'Migration and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities for EU Education Systems' (2008) reported that many migrant pupils suffer from structural disadvantages in school. For example, research has shown a high correlation between language proficiency and academic achievement when measured by standardised tests. Migrant pupils in European countries often attain lower scores on standardised tests than their native-born peers (Barth et al. 2008). Lower educational achievement and leaving school before graduation put these children at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion throughout their adult lives (EUMC 2004, Stanat and Christensen 2006).

Drawing on a qualitative study conducted in Scotland, this paper focuses on the experiences of first-generation Polish migrant children and their families. I use the term migrant children and youth to refer to young people born abroad from parents who are also foreign-born (in terms of the host country). By giving voice to these young migrants, the paper seeks to connect work on migration by children and youth to current developments in education policy and school practice. This paper focuses on the identification of some barriers of inclusion that are the result of school practices. In particular, it examines the issues of home-school relations and language learning. These issues offer considerable scope for the exploration of inclusion by migrant children and their families.

## **Cultural capital in migrant children education**

Schooling acts as a powerful mediating institution between migrant families, their children and the social and political contexts that they enter. The cultural capital theory originally developed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1971, Bourdieu 1983, 1986) is important here, since it may allow us to draw links between the experiences of migrant children, their families and school policies regarding societal integration. Bourdieu (1971) proposed that cultural capital is a mechanism for the transmission of social status, and can be converted into both social and economic capital. Cultural capital is differentiated into three sub-forms: incorporated cultural capital; institutionalised cultural capital; and objective cultural capital. Incorporated cultural capital comprises dispositions, sets of meaning and modes of thinking. Georg (2004:334) defined institutionalised cultural capital as ‘a result of educational achievements in educational institutions with the power to define what is important and unimportant knowledge’ and objective cultural capital as artefacts such as books, art, etc.

The concept of incorporated cultural capital is relevant to this discussion of migration and migrant adaptation to the host society because cultural capital is degraded as a result of migration. Many forms of cultural capital are heavily dependent on the context and society in which and for which they have been acquired. Language is a prime example, since lack of language competence is a key concern of research on migrant children and schooling (Esser 2006, Glenn and de Jong 1996). Cummins (2000; cited by Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011: 313) argued that approximately five to seven years are required for migrant language learners to develop academic language proficiency. This proficiency is necessary to compete with native speakers on standardised-assessment tests that are ubiquitous for international student

assessments and comparisons, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA; Christiansen and Segeritz 2008). The results of PISA's 2006 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of 57 different countries revealed that 'first-generation immigrant students in OECD countries lag on average more than 50 points behind their peers, which is roughly equivalent to one and a half years of schooling when considering the OECD average difference in performance between school years' (Christensen and Segeritz 2008: 13-14). Success or failure on these high-stakes tests has important implications for access to higher education. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2011:314) stated that standardised assessment tests were not objective measures, and knowledge of language and cultural schema can influence scores.

However language competence does not guarantee successful adaptation: there are less obvious barriers which could be also included in the concept of cultural capital transference, in which all sub-forms must gain recognition by those who are already dominant within the field. Devine (2009:523-524) argued that recognition is the central element for the mobilisation of cultural capital. Those who possess 'recognised' cultural capital are seen as competent in their knowledge and 'confident in their capacity to generate long-term benefit from their investment in education'. She argued further that the capacity to recognise and be recognised is itself integral to the distribution of power, with significant differences across social groupings, both in the volume of capital that agents hold and the relative weighting of different types of capital (social, cultural or economic) in each field (Bourdieu 1989: 17).

Leopold and Shavit (2011) provided an interesting example of the recognition mechanism in the host society. The study of migrant students in Israeli schools presented the hypothesis that migrants obtained fewer benefits from their cultural

capital than their native peers. The cultural capital of families affected children's educational achievements via two processes: first, certain forms of cultural capital, especially reading books, enhanced students' cognitive development and contributed to their mastery of the curriculum. Students who came from culturally endowed homes were thus better prepared for academic success.

Second, some aspects of the mechanism for recognition of cultural capital operated via the cultural prejudices of teachers and schools. The study concluded that the level of the children's reading comprehension could not explain the effects of cultural capital on grades. Since migrant parents tended to possess cultural capital that was alien to the local school culture, teachers were unlikely to distinguish between high and low cultural signals. The teachers and schools in the study favoured students who were perceived to be culturally endowed, with the consequence that these students were assigned higher grades (Leopold and Shavit 2011).

Similarly to Leopold and Shavit (2011), other studies examining the adaptation of migrant children and youth suggest that the cultural capital of newly arrived pupils may not be easily accepted by the new environment (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001, D'Angelo and Ryan 2011). On the other hand, the cultural capital that is valued within the host society may also not be accessible to these migrant students upon arrival (Lopez Rodriguez 2010, Erel 2010). However, recent research shows (Holland, Reynolds and Weller 2007), that despite these obstacles, migrant children are often 'key contributors to processes of [cultural] capital accumulation by the family' (Devine 2009:526). Acknowledging the active involvement of children and young people in their own and their families' adaptation processes (White, Ní Laoire, Tyrrell and Carpena-Méndez 2011:1164) we must also

consider the importance of the family as a site of mediation between schools, migrant children and their families (Moskal 2014).

School and family are the two central entities in a child's life (Melton et al. 2000). As social agents, children may act as mediators or translators for the host institution with their families, and vice versa. Successful home–school relations (understood as communication and cooperation between these two sociological constructs) are crucial for children's social and emotional wellbeing (Christenson and Sheridan 2001) and it is assumed that this may translate into better adaptation to a new environment as well as academic success.

Parents may measure the 'success' of their children in the new society in terms of how well the children are performing in school, learning the new language and making new friends (Adams and Shambleau 2006: 88). This was demonstrated by D'Angelo and Ryan (2011) in their study of Polish children in London. Lopez Rodriguez (2010) showed that some Polish migrant parents pushed their children to succeed at school to overcome their own sense of social stigmatisation. Robila (2011) argued that parental satisfaction with migration engendered higher quality of childcare, psychosocial functioning and academic achievement.

Giving attention to the experiences of migrant children and youth in schools and the relationship between the school and the family can provide important insights into social inclusion and language learning among migrant children.

### **Polish migrant population in Scotland**

After Poland's entry to the EU in 2004, many people moved from Poland to the UK to find employment. Immigration from Poland and other Central and East European countries to the UK has contributed significantly to 'super-diversity' in Britain. These migrants bring cultural capital and languages that have no specific historical (colonial) links with Britain (Vertovec 2007). Polish is the second most common language in England, Wales and Scotland according to the data from Population Census 2011 (ONS 2013).

Both in EU and UK terms, Scotland has not been heavily impacted by mass migration. Since 2004 however, Scotland has experienced a marked increase in migratory flows, with Poles making up the vast majority of this new movement. It is estimated that there are currently more than 70,000 Poles living in Scotland (Ditekow 2011). An increasing number of Polish families have relocated to Scotland, having found employment here. Young Polish migrants form one of the fastest growing percentages of the school-age population in Scotland. Their number has increased by about 1,000 every year since 2004. In 2012 there were over 8,000 Polish children and adolescents in Scottish schools (Scottish Government, Pupil Census - Supplementary Data 2012). The number of pupils speaking Polish as a primary home language constituted the largest population of schools in Scotland, after students who speak English at home – 634,000 (Scottish Government Pupil Census - Supplementary Data 2012). Although cities remain the main centres of concentration for these migrants, rural areas are increasingly affected by migration as well.

In Scotland, mainstream education without home language teaching is the dominant type of education. The common view is that language programmes that relentlessly focus on the integration of children into mainstream school life are essential. Instruction of migrant pupils in their mother tongue is conducted by

voluntary and private initiatives, because there is no provision for such tuition within the education system. The number of voluntary and supplementary Polish schools, which operate mainly on Saturdays and are operated by Polish teachers, grew from three in 2006 to twenty-two in 2011. Approximately 1,400 Polish pupils attend these classes (Dietkow 2011).

It is important, therefore, to find out more about the educational experiences of the new Polish population, and if these could be improved. The analysis presented in this paper focuses on young migrants and families to provide a better understanding of challenges of adaptation process. It investigates their cultural identity, relationships within their family and interactions with their ethnic community and the mainstream culture (which happens mostly via schooling).

## **Method**

The data on which this paper is based draw on ethnographic study. The population for this qualitative study included young people from the three primary and three secondary schools in Scotland: three located in large urban centres (Edinburgh, Aberdeen), one semi-urban (North Lanarkshire) and two in rural towns (Highlands). Additionally, one study participant was a student at a professional college in an urban location. All the schools were co-educational; three were Roman Catholic and three were non-confessionals. Two of the schools in Edinburgh and Highlands were located within a working-class estate; the remaining four serviced socially mixed populations. Individual interviews were conducted with boys ( $n = 18$ ) and girls ( $n = 23$ ) aged 5–17 years old.

The data for analysis also included observations recorded during visits by the author to the schools and family homes. All the 41 migrant children and young people participating in the study were first generation migrants, who were born in Poland and who came to Scotland with or after their parent(s). They were all English second language learners, since Scotland was usually the first foreign country where they had visited or resided. The length of time of residence in Scotland ranged from a few months to four years, with the average duration being two years. The children's opinions were centre-balanced by those of their parents (n = 24) and teachers (n = 18) who took part in the research. The majority of the carers group were mothers, but the group also included five fathers, two grandfathers and one grandmother. Teachers' interviews consisted mainly of the view of EAL teachers and assistants, with input from learning teachers (n = 11) as well as school managers and principals (n = 7).

The interviews used for this study were designed to examine the extent to which schooling practices are or are not being adapted to meet the needs of migrant children, and to establish the extent to which those children and young people successfully negotiate the interface between family and school. The families were accessed through schools in Scotland that are attended by a substantial number of Polish migrant children. Interviews were conducted with migrant children and parents in their homes and in schools, after classroom hours. All the interviews with family members were conducted in the Polish language, then transcribed and translated into English. All the student participants in the study had arrived in Scotland with limited or no English skills. Since the children were interviewed at different stages of the settlement process, some of the participants had progressed well while others had made minor progress toward English language competence. The data were gathered from the perspective of migrant children and young people (Christensen and Allison

2000), and their experiences in the family, as well as their families' formal and informal contacts with the school.

### **Language and cultural capital in new schools**

As indicated earlier, migrant children face specific challenges and opportunities at their new schools. Frequently, they have experienced interruption of the academic year, as well as difficulty in transferring school records in addition to lack of English language skills. They usually resumed their studies as soon as they arrived in Scotland. The language issue seems particularly important in adapting children into the classroom. There has been an overwhelming pressure on Polish children and youth to quickly integrate into the new language at the new school system. *I did not want to go to English school because I did not know language. I wanted to go to school in Poland*, said Natalie (15 years old, suburban RC high school). Many pupils expressed the perception of pressure to speak English and to learn in English. This was often associated with anxiety and resistance: for example Marc (8 year old, suburban primary school) commented on how he adapted to the new school: *I like the children and art classes and football. I like also math but I do not like English because English is very difficult*. Not all the young people coped well with this challenge, and some dropped out before they began to adapt: *There are now fourteen Polish pupils in my school. There were two more but they were expelled because they were absent too often* reported Julia (17 years old suburban RC school).

Young respondents noted that acquiring English fluency was central. The young peoples' desire to improve their English was linked to an awareness of the lack of cultural currency or recognition of their native language in the classroom (Devine

2009). Olivia, 15 years old (rural high school), emphasised language learning as the most important part of her adaptation: *I must learn English well. I already learnt a lot, I think. I am glad there are no Polish pupils in my class so I am learning faster. Although I am befriending only with Polish people at the moment, I try to make English friends but it is difficult, as I do not communicate as comfortable as they do.*

One very important factor in accommodation of increased numbers of migrant students is the issue of resources. Teachers in our study raised concerns over the lack of specialist support in schools for assisting children who did not speak English as their first language. Some schools (mostly urban secondary schools) had developed specific language support programs for migrant pupils, with teachers who had some training in the English as an additional language (EAL) providing this support.

In a significant number of schools surveyed for this study, classroom teachers and those specifically appointed as language assistants expressed concern about the lack of appropriate in-service training for this purpose. These schools tended to rely on their teachers' abilities to improvise in this regard, as well as on Polish-speaking classroom assistants or other Polish-speaking children. Sometimes the presence of language support teachers resulted in paradoxical situations, where mainstream classroom teachers failed to address the interests of migrant children, believing that these would be handled by the language support personnel (Devine 2009).

There is evidence of increased demand for English language tuition to enable Polish pupils to access school curricula. The number of pupils who are classified as English as an Additional Language (EAL), or 'new to English' has increased as a result of the recent increased in the migration flow from Poland (Pupils in Scotland 2010). The impact on the learning and teaching process for other pupils in these

schools whose interests may be marginalised was described by Matt, 8 years old, who told us:

*In my school the teacher does not help us because in my school there is not enough places, so I and my cousin and four Scottish children we go to third class, (even though we are at the fourth) and the teacher concentrates to help these from the third class instead of us and we have to learn alone.*

It was clear that an investment to cover the real costs of providing English as an additional language support, especially with regard to the unplanned arrival of new migrants in a particular area was needed. Some schools, in particular rural schools with few migrant students, do not have the resources for providing students with any specialised language support at all.

Many young participants also expressed their opinions of what should be done about language support. For example, Diana (11 years old student at an urban primary school) gave her view: *I would like some Polish teachers to assist our lessons all the time and to help us and translate for us what we cannot understand. At the moment the teacher asks our Polish classmate to help us but she is not always able to help us.*

Natalie (15 years old) said: *I think at the beginning the new pupils here should get more English classes and not learn the other subjects because the most Polish do come like me without knowing English.*

Robert, an 11 year old student at a city primary school proposed that: *I would introduce more help to make it easier: right now a support teacher is coming once a week, she should be here all the time to help.* Many participants emphasised that the attitude of a teacher was most important in assisting new pupils to overcome language difficulties:

*I am happy with the help I get here, the teacher always explains everything I cannot understand in English, and sometimes I understand sometimes not. There is a lot of help in class and the school is better than in Poland (Adam, 13 years old, rural high school in Highlands).*

The students participating in our study related various factors that helped them to learn English: *I do not understand everything yet but quite a lot during the lessons. Teacher helps me, shows me many things by hands and then explain (Marc, 8 year old).*

The challenge of second language acquisition can serve to mask the other skills, knowledge and aspirations of young migrants. Many teachers reported that they had limited information on the background of young migrants. This lack of personal information can foster inadvertent prejudice, and low expectations on the part of teachers. Some teachers admitted during the interview that they did not draw on the previous educational experiences of migrant pupils due to belief that this background was limited. As a result, migrant pupils were not always effectively assessed, and were not been expected to perform to their potential.

*I did not expect to be very good in maths; I was definitely not in Poland. I go to the first class here, I should be in the second but they put me in the first because I do not know English enough (Adrian, 13 years old, rural high school in Highlands).*

The schools surveyed had limited information on the background of migrant children and the education system in their country of origin. Some also have very low expectations of what the children could achieve. These may lead to misjudgement of the appropriate pace for learning for each student, and result in the failure to progress

appropriately. This situation was particularly difficult for those who arrived in the country as teenager (12 years or older) who often failed to achieve in the English exam system. Once they have reached the age of 16, these pupils fall under the auspices of post-compulsory adult education, which provides vocational courses that are designed to prepare adults for entry into the workforce. ESOL teenagers are placed on course to improve their language levels, which must be done before they can proceed to vocational training. This strategy to place young people who have not completed their general education into general ESOL classes followed by an adult curriculum has been highly controversial (Cook 2008).

Margaret (42 years old, mother of 15 year old Thomas) described her difficulties with understanding school assessments and policies:

*My son was enrolled to secondary four then he eventually had to go to secondary five to continue education. However, now the head teacher decided that he should rather go to the college. So, he waits for a college now to start after his 16th birthday in January next year [it was May at the time of interview]. He will attend English classes at the college twice a week before January. I do not find right to have school only twice a week with one subject - what 15 years old will do with the rest of his time. I am very disappointed because he is left without any support and he is still a child. During the meeting with the head teacher they explained us that the school would send his document to the college and would arrange our meeting in the college but that never took place and we had to send the document at the last moment. I am a bit surprised because in my opinion the school want to get rid of him.*

On the other hand, young participants have demonstrated a capacity to acquire the new language and new cultural capital to build their own strategy for the future. For example, Matthew (17 years old, urban school) reported that he had decided to go to a professional college in Scotland. So after graduating from school in Poland, he joined his mother and sister who were living here already. He willingly completed an intermediate ESOL course before entering professional college: *To be in the college gives me a lot of satisfaction; they say at the beginning that this is my future and I do believe in that. This school opens me the way to adulthood*, he stated.

Many participating families expressed a lack of knowledge about the school system of the host country. There was also confusion in the matter of language learning and language needs, especially for children had who already spent some time in the new country and had become bilingual, even before entering school. For example, a mother of five year old son reported sending her son to speech therapy on her own initiative, since she was concerned about her child's ability to cope in school. Many other Polish bilingual children attended the speech therapy group, she said. She did not perceive the speech therapy as effective. According to the mother's report, the therapist had not understood that some of the children might not need the therapy, since as they were already bilingual.

Many Polish children and their parents said they found school in Scotland 'easy': *It is easy at school here. School is sometimes boring because we do nothing and everything is easy. There is nothing to do at home, no homework so sometimes we are bored at home after school* (Paula, 16 years old, suburban Catholic high school). Paula's statement supports the idea that migrant children are not always effectively assessed and are not been pushed to perform to their potential: *I go to the first class*

*here, I should be in the second but they put me in the first because I do not know English enough* (Adam, 13 years old, rural high school in Highlands).

Additional evidence of the contrast between schools in Scotland and Poland comes from a Polish Saturday school attended by Polish migrant students from various primary schools in a suburban area:

Matt, 8 years old: *I like in school here that I have good results and the teacher praise me.*

Alex, 11 years old: *The teachers praise you because you are Polish; I do have the same situation.*

Veronika, 10 years old: *Me too.*

Alex: *The Polish pupils are better, because we have better learning, four times more knowledge we could learn, in one week as much as they (Scottish children) learn in one month.*

Alex and Veronika: *The school is easy here.*

### **Migration and the relationships with parents and peers**

The meaningful relationships for migrant students include parents, ethnic peers and extended family that represent home and a sense of the native country. A mobile lifestyle involving several adjustments seemed to impact upon young people who felt uncomfortable in the new location, and preferred to or felt forced to socialise with ethnic peers (Tyrrell 2012, Ní Laoire et al. 2011). For children and young people, relationships were important in sustaining motivation for engagement in school (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2008).

Academic engagement and achievement were also strengthened by supportive relationships, since migrant students stated their motivation to learn for the sake of their families, whom they often understood to have sacrificed so they might have better opportunities (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2008). For example, Matt (8 years old) reported during the interview that: *I have many Polish friends, and among the Scottish colleagues no one wants to play with me, because I am Polish, and when I play football no one want to pass me the ball.* Study participants reported the perception that language was a barrier to socialising with their peers in the new environment. Soon after migration, it became clear that peer relationships were important relational resources as well as the source of major problems. The participants encountered difficulty expressing their needs and opinions, and understanding the demands of the host society. They felt ridiculed and rejected by their peers because of their lack of English proficiency.

Migrant parents encouraged a range of qualities in their children, including responsibility, hard work, desire for achievement, social competence and access to important social networks. The parents tried to develop their children's agency, and indeed saw this as a goal of their parental investment and the sacrifice of their time. For example, Adam (male, age 13) expressed the sense of responsibility he felt toward his family: *The important things for me are: to help my family, so I should help my family; cooperation with the colleges here to cope with the language; I mean the Scottish language and the English language which is important when we need to go somewhere outside of Scotland. On my tree there is also the family, friends and learning.*

Adam's narrative provided an opportunity to go beyond the focus on language attainment, and consider the networks of support in which each migrant student

operated, giving weight to meaningful relationships and family communications. Migrant children with a greater sense of attachment to their family may report more positive psychological well-being and self-esteem (Suárez-Orozco and Baolian Qin 2006). Adam (above) articulated these concerns by expressing the sense of responsibility he felt toward his family.

For many young Polish migrants, family respect for their cultural capital seemed to offset the socioeconomic disadvantages they encountered. Polish labour migrant families seemed to draw on the cultural capital originating from educational practices in their home country. In correlation with the importance attached to education by their parents, overall educational achievement was high among student participants.

Concern regarding the education of their children schooling was cited as an important factor for parents when they were making the decision whether or not to remain in Scotland: *We did hesitate a lot at the beginning whether we should stay here or not but after children came back from school with happy faces, we said we want to stay* reported Jadwiga, 35 years old mother of two school children in a suburban area. Similarly, Justyna, a 17 year old girl at a suburban Catholic high school, described how concerns about education for her and her siblings influenced her parents' migration decision:

*Maybe, when I will be older I would come back to Poland. My parents are waiting until me and my siblings finish schools here, and then they want to come back to Poland. They leave us the choice when we would like to stay as adults.*

Particular localities shape us into who ‘we are’ but also who ‘we are not’ (Reay and Lucey 2000). Study participants cited social as well as educational experiences that differed from those of Scottish young people that they knew. In her view of school, Wiktoria 10 years old saw an obvious division: *We, Polish, are numerous, the most numerous group in school after Scottish children of course. Recently one Polish colleague joined our class, she does not understand anything, as I have to be with her and translate her everything. And there is another one who just arrived and I have to help both.*

For many students, their school experiences in Poland remained a central reference point. Being schooled in two countries defined the identity of many students, and they made constant comparisons: *I preferred the school in Poland because the language was ‘normal’. Here I go to school only with Scottish children. I would prefer many Polish instead* said Marek, 8 years old.

Some students reported conflict between their educational and social preferences: *From the point of view learning we prefer the school here but from the point of view of friends and playtime in school we definitely like more school in Poland* agreed the girls participating in a group interview at a suburban Catholic high school (Natasz, 15 years old; Paula, 16 years old; Julia, 17 years old; Patricja, 16 years old). The children’s experience of poor adaptation to local communities in Scotland was occasionally reflected in their plans for the future. Some of the children envisaged returning to Poland or living elsewhere. In the short term, most students wanted to or had completed school in Scotland. Most of the students were aware that switching back to schools in their home country would be very difficult. For example, Robert, 11 years old imagined himself returning school to Poland, and said:

*I think I would have difficulties in Polish school now for sure, because with my Scottish level of knowledge they would put me to the 3rd classes while all my old friends would be already two levels above me. That wouldn't be nice at all, because my friends would make fun of me and it would be still difficult at Polish school to learn so I prefer the school here.*

Julia, a 17 year old student at a suburban Catholic high school, expressed a similar opinion: *I have to continue education here; I can't come back to Poland because I would never achieve the knowledge the Polish pupils have at the same age.*

Teacher participants in the study reported that assessment of new migrant pupils focused almost entirely on English language ability. All of the teachers interviewed mentioned the multilingual capacity of many of the children. In this sense, the responses of the teachers to the language needs of their migrant students were framed in terms of English language deficit, underpinned by a concern that the children could not integrate socially without the requisite fluency (Devine 2005: 58). Communication with the school where their children were enrolled was difficult for parents, who often had poor English language skills. These parents were often unaware of parents' events or issues affecting their children's schooling. They expressed uncertainty about addressing their children's problems at school. For example, Maria, the 43 year old mother of two daughters who had attended school in an urban location in Scotland for one year complained to us:

*I do have a great barrier to speak English. I do understand most of the things but I cannot talk well and I feel disabled. In Poland I could say something to other parents coming to school e.g. what I do not like and that their children*

*are bullying mine, etc. My daughters were bullied at the beginning of their schooling here and I could not do anything.*

While some schools were able to provide interpreters for parents who lacked English skills, others did not have the necessary resources to offer this service. Frequently, parents had to locate someone to assist them in communicating with the school. Ewelina, the mother of a 9-year-old boy stated that: *I usually bring somebody I know with me when I go to school to be able to communicate with the head teacher and to avoid the situation that I do not know what has been said.*

Migrant children often act as facilitators in the processes of settlement and community building, through their work as language and cultural brokers (Orellana 2001). These children 'bridge the gap' by assisting in their parents' cultural integration. Most frequently, these children act as translators for parents who are not able to communicate in English: *When, I arrived I had a break and from September I went to school. We had no problem with enrolment and documents because my brother speaks English (as the only person in the family who could at that time) said Gosia, 14 years old.*

Through their children, parents may establish contact with other parents, teachers and social service providers. Some schools organised special meetings for migrant parents to encourage socialisation. Migrants with little or limited English skills were subject to feelings of social isolation. For some of the parents, especially mothers, this was their only outlet for a social life:

*I meet two Polish friends here; we meet sometimes but not very often. There were some meetings in my son's school, organised by the Head Teacher. I had a translator. Every Thursday women from different ethnic groups met there for tea or coffee and*

*for a chat about their country of origin, and to learn something together like photography or present their national cuisine. I made 'bigos': the Scottish liked it, they even asked about the recipe so I gave them but I am not sure if they used it (Ewa 41 years old, mother of 3 children).*

In this sense, school and educational policies discouraged students from retaining their primary languages. If students retained their culture and language, they risk being perceived as less capable of identifying with the mainstream culture and learning the mainstream language of the society (Cummins 2000).

The majority of the parents taking part in this study were aware of the importance of the English language for their children's education and prospects, yet did not wish their children to abandon their Polish identity and language. For example, Jadwiga, 35 years old stated: *We found out soon after arrival that there is a Polish Saturday school open in the area and our children could go there. We want our children to remember Polish language and the country they come from. This is also important in respect to the grandparents, as the children should be able to communicate with them and to know our culture and history.*

Raising awareness of the debate about primary language retention is necessary in Scotland, since the increase in intra-European mobility will lead to European policy recommendations regarding this issue.

## **Conclusions**

This article has considered how the first generation of Polish migrant children experience language and cultural capital shifts through education. The analyses of the young migrants' attitudes towards learning, acquiring a new language and diversity in

school shows that family support was important for encouraging young people to learn English and to socialise to acquire new cultural capital. Language fluency, educational success and the ability to compensate for the sense of loss engendered by migration were the major factors for inclusion identified by the study participants. An emphasis on education and overall academic achievement was high among study participants.

Language barriers and lack of understanding of how the educational system worked caused misunderstandings for migrant pupils and their parents. Many of the interviews with Polish students and their parents expressed the opinion that school had lower expectations of pupils in comparison with Polish schools. That was one of the reasons why a significant number of participants regarded the school in the host society as 'easy' and inferior to those in their country of origin.

Migrant parents have less experience with the school system of the host society (Kirsten and Granato 2007) and their cultural capital can differ from the cultural capital that was valued in the school systems of the host country. Thus the host country schools are unlikely to foster the educational achievement of migrant children to the same degree as that for students possessing local cultural capital (Leopold and Shavit 2011). The findings of this study showed that schools focused almost entirely on the English language skill deficits of migrant students and did not always include their other abilities in assessment. Some of these students responded to these problems by becoming segregated from their native English-speaking peers, to the detriment of their socialisation and English language development.

Many teachers reported that they had received limited information on the background of their migrant students. This highlighted the need for schools to communicate effectively with all parents, as well as the need for consistent

assessment methods, for example through standardised documentation of children's background to make their transition to the new school easier and to enable accurate assessment.

The teachers also expressed concern about increased competition for places in the schools, and about intense competition for English language support services for new migrant pupils and their parents. Schools in Scotland had different strategies for addressing the issue of migrant inclusion. Some schools developed specific programs for English language learning support, while others relied on the willingness of teachers and Polish-speaking classroom assistants or other Polish-speaking children to accommodate the communication needs of these migrant students. The multilingual abilities of many of the students were rarely recognised.

The dominant educational policies were not always attuned to the needs of migrant pupils. There is a need for all education systems to consider establishing programs for foreign language learning, since this would reduce cultural barriers in the classroom. In Scotland, educational authorities do not address bilingual learners in program planning, and do not usually allocate resources to the English language learning needs of migrant students. A child-centred philosophy for teaching migrant students needs to be introduced.

Since more children are being born to migrant parents within Scotland, the next phase for education programs should be the provision of mother tongue tuition. The research is very clear about the importance of retention of the mother tongue for bilingual children's overall personal and educational development (Baker 2000, Cummins 2000, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Research on second-language acquisition and bilingualism (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011:315) suggested that 'balanced

bilinguals', that is, migrant children and youth who maintain their home language as they acquire a second academic language, tend to demonstrate better educational trajectories over time (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

The analysis presented in this paper highlight a holistic approach to educational support for new migrant children; this includes language and general academic support, good home-school relations, and intercultural education (Gropas and Triandafylliou 2011). Recent European Commission (2013) comparative analysis based on different European countries suggests that schools should avoid segregation as well as early selection of pupils in terms of ability, as this may disadvantage migrant children who are adapting to a new language. The goal of inclusive education is not limited to the socialisation or assimilation of people into the culture; it is to enable each individual to retain and develop the cultural identity (Blanco and Takemoto 2006: 58) is usually grounded in family cultural and linguistic capital. Educational policies regarding language, curriculum and instruction should be established with the goal of affirming the cultural capital of young people and their families, as an acknowledgement of the diversity that exists in the broader society (Cummins 2000).

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the European Commission for funding the research presented in this paper (EC Marie Curie project EU: ECPief-219914), and all of the participant children, young people and families for sharing their experiences. I would also like to thank two anonymous referees for their very constructive comments.

## References

- Adams, L. D., and Shambleau, K. M. 2006. Teachers', children's and parents' perspectives on newly arrived children's adjustment to elementary school. In: L. D. Adams and A. Kirova (eds), *Global Migration and Education: Schools, Children and Families.*, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Baker, C. 2000. *A parents' and teachers' guide to bilingualism*, Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Barth H, Heimer A, Pfeiffer I. 2008. Integration through education: promising practices, strategies and initiatives in ten countries. In Morehouse C. *Immigrant Students Can Succeed: Lessons from Around the Globe. Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008.* Gütersloh, Germ.: Verl. Bertelsmann-Stiftung, 119–88.
- Blanco, R. and Takemoto, C.Y. 2006. Inclusion in Schools in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Case of the Children of Haitian Descent in the Dominican Republic In Adams, L.D. and Kirova, A. (Eds) *Global Migration and Education: Schools, Children and Families.* London and New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. The forms of capital. In *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, ed. J.G. Richardson, 46–58. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1989. Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory* 7, 1: 14–25.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Richard Nice (tr.). Sage Publications, London.
- Christensen, P. and Allison J.eds. 2000. *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* 24, New York: Falmer Press.
- Christensen G, Segeritz M. 2008. An international perspective on student achievement, In Morehouse C. 2008. *Immigrant Students Can Succeed: Lessons from*

*Around the Globe. Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008.* Gütersloh, Germ.: Verl. Bertelsmann-Stiftung: 11–36.

Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. 2001. *Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Cook, M. 2008. What We Might Become: The Lives, Aspirations, and Education of Young Migrants in the London Area, *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 7(1): 22-40.

Cummins, J. 2000. *Language, power, and pedagogy. Bilingual children in the crossfire,* Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

D'Angelo, A. And Ryan, L. 2011. Sites of Socialisation –Polish Parents and Children in London School, *Studia Migracyjne - Przegląd Polonijny*, Special Issue Garapich, M.P. (ed.) Polacy na Wyspach (w Wielkiej Brytanii), 1.

Darmody, M., Byrne, D. and McGinnity, F. 2014. Cumulative disadvantage? Educational careers of migrant students in Irish secondary schools. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 17(1): 129-151

de Block, L. and Buckingham, D. 2007. *Global Children, Global Media: Migration, Media and Childhood.* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Devine, D. 2009. 'Mobilising capitals? Migrant children's negotiation of their everyday lives in school', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30:5, 521- 535.

Devine, D; 2005. 'Welcome to the Celtic Tiger? Teacher Responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in Irish schools'. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 15 (1): 49-70.

Dietkow, A. 2011. Poles in Scotland – Before and After 2004 In: T.M. Devine and David Hess (eds.) *Scotland and Poland. Historical Encounters, 1500-2010*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.

- Esser, H. 2006. Migration, Language and Integration. AKI Research Review 4. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, [www.wz-berlin.de](http://www.wz-berlin.de)
- European Commission (2013) Migrant children more likely to end up in poor schools, EC reports IP/13/323
- European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) (2004) Migrants, Minorities and Education. Documenting Discrimination and Integration in 15 Member States of the European Union. Luxembourg.
- Eriksen, T.H. 2007. Complexity in social and cultural integration: Some analytical dimensions, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6): 1055-1069.
- Fine M, Jaffe-Walter R, Pedraza P, Futch V, Stoudt B. 2007. Swimming on oxygen: resistance and possibility for immigrant youth under siege. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 38: 76–96.
- Georg, W. (2004). Cultural Capital and Social Inequality in the Life Course, *European Sociological Review*, 20(4): 333-344.
- Gorpas, R. and Triandafylliou, A. 2011. Greek education policy and the challenge of migration: an ‘intercultural’ view of assimilation. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 14(3): 399-419.
- Heckmann, F. et al. 2008. Education and migration - strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies. Report submitted to the European Commission by the NESSE network of experts, [http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/nesse\\_top/tasks](http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/nesse_top/tasks)
- Hess, J. and Shandy, D. 2008. Kids at the crossroads: global childhood and the state, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(4): 765-76.

Holland, J., Reynolds, T. and Weller, S. 2007. Transitions, networks and communities: The significance of social capital in the lives of children and young people, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10 (1): 101-120.

Hugonnier B. 2007. Globalization and education: Can the world meet the challenge? In Suárez-Orozco, M.M. 2007. *Learning in the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education*. Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press, 137–57.

Kristen, C. and Granato, N. 2007. The Education Ateintment of the Secon generation in Germany Social Origins ad Ethnic Inequality IAB Disscussion Papers: 4., <http://doku.iab.de/discussionpapers/2007/dp0407.pdf>

Leopold, L. and Shavit, Y. 2011. Cultural Capital Does Not Travel Well: Immigrants, Natives and Achievement in Israeli Schools, *European Sociological Review*, first published online doi:10.1093/esr/jcr086

Lopez Rodriguez, M. 2010. Migration and a quest for ‘normalcy’, Polish migrant mothers and the capitalization of meritocratic opportunities in the UK, *Social Identities*, 16 (3): 339-358.

Melton, G. B., Limber, S. P., & Teague, T. L. 2000. Changing schools for changing families. In R. C. Pianta & M. J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten*, 179–213. Baltimore, MD: Paul. H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Moskal, M. 2014. Polish migrant youth in Scottish schools: conflicted identity and family capital. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17 (2): 279-291.

Ní Laoire, C., Carpena-Mendez, F., Tyrrell, N., and White, A., 2011. *Childhood and migration in Europe: Portraits of mobility, identity and belonging in contemporary Ireland*. Farnham: Ashgate.

OECD PISA 2006. *Problem Solving for Tomorrow's World – First Measures of Cross-Curricular Competencies* (Paris: OECD)

Orellana, M. 2001. The work kids do: Mexican and Central American immigrant children's contributions to households, schools and community in California, *Harvard Educational Review* 7(3): 366-89.

Orellana, M.F., Thorne, B., Chee, A. and Lam, W. S. E. 2001. Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration, *Social Problems*, 48 (4): 573-592.

Portes A, Rumbaut R. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press.

Ribolzi, L. 2007. Between Inclusion and Marginality: The Role of Education in Migrant Children, *Journal of Social Science Education*, 6(1): 45-56.

Robila, M. 2011. Parental Migration and Children's Outcomes in Romania. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 20(3), 326-333.

Ryan, L. 2011. Migrants' social networks and weak ties: accessing resources and constructing relationships post-migration. *The Sociological Review*, 59(4), 707–724.

Scottish Government, Pupil Census, Supplementary Data (2012). online document on [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

Sime, D., Fox, R. and Pietka, E. 2010. *At home Abroad: The life experiences of Eastern European migrant children in Scotland*. ESRC report. University of Strathclyde.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 2000. *Linguistic genocide in education-or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Stanat, P. and Christensen, C. 2006. Where Immigrant Students Succeed. A Comparative Review of Performance and Engagement in Pisa 2003, OECD Paris.

Suárez-Orozco, M. M., Darbes, T., Dias, S.I., and Sutin, M. 2011. Migration and Schooling, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 40: 311-328.

Suárez-Orozco, M.M., Quin, D.B. 2006. gendered perspectives in psychology: Immigrant origin youth. *International Migration Review* 40(1): 165-198.

Suárez-Orozco M, Sattin-Bajaj C. 2010. *Educating the Whole Child for the Whole World*. New York: NY University Press.

Suárez-Orozco C, Suárez-Orozco M.M. 2001. Transnationalism of the heart: familyhood across borders. In: *What is Parenthood? Competing Models for Understanding Today's Revolution in Parenthood*. Ed. D Cere, L McClain. London: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Tanyas, B. 2012. Making sense of migration: young Turks' experiences in The United Kingdom, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 15(6): 693-710.

Tyrrelle, N. 2012. 'Of course, I'm not Irish': young people in migrant worker families in Ireland and their plans for the future, In 'Spacing Ireland' edited by Caroline Crowley and Denis Linehan, Manchester University Press.

White, A., Ní Laoire, C., Tyrrell, N. and Carpena-Méndez, F. 2011. Children's Roles in Transnational Migration, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(8): 1159-1170.

Vertovec, S. 2007.. Super-diversity and its implications, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6): 1024-1054.